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DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN

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ADOPTED MARCH 3, 1992

BRADY AND ASSOCIATES PLANNERS AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

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LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN

SUBMITTED TO THE  
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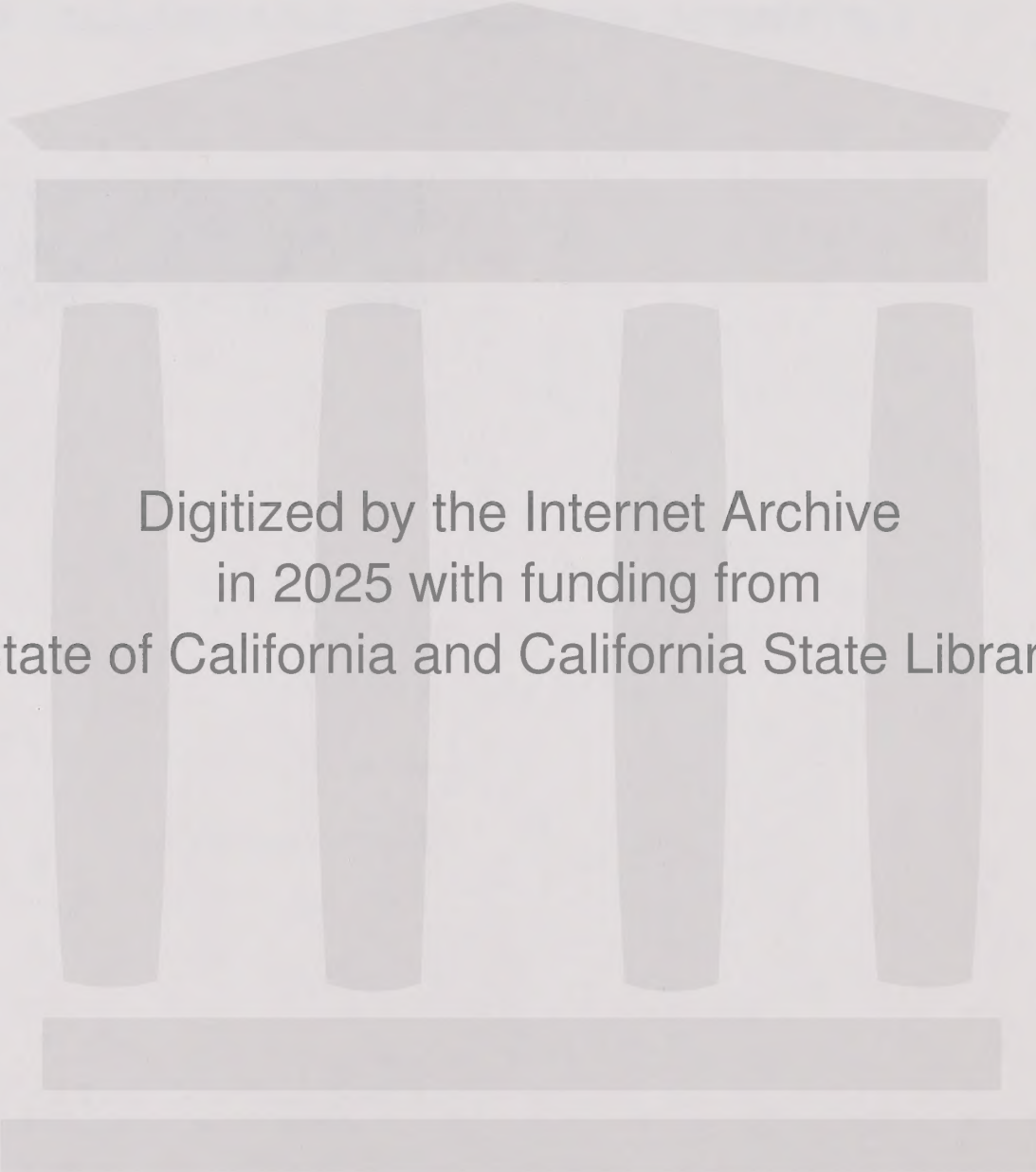


ADOPTED MARCH 3, 1992

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## **Chapter I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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#### **A. Plan Overview**

This document constitutes a Draft Specific Plan that describes future market opportunities, land uses, design, circulation, parking and implementation of improvements in Downtown Larkspur, California. The overall objective of the Downtown Specific Plan is to provide a detailed plan to guide and facilitate the continuing development and conservation of the designated Downtown area.

The Downtown Specific Plan process was initiated by the City Council as a result of the General Plan process, which made clear that the Downtown area required special planning consideration. This Specific Plan is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of potential development in the Downtown, with particular consideration of market forces, parking availability and urban design.

The plan sets forth detailed land use and circulation standards, financing and development strategies, and regulatory changes and supporting policies that will be necessary to implement the plan.

#### **B. Statutory Authority**

Under California Law (Government Code Section 65459 et. seq.), cities and counties may use Specific Plans to develop policies, programs, and regulations to implement the jurisdiction's adopted General Plan. The Specific Plan frequently serves as a bridge between the general plan and individual development master plans.

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This Specific Plan has been prepared in a manner consistent with the requirements of State Planning and Zoning Law, Article 8. According to State law, a Specific Plan should include text and diagrams which specify the following:

1. The distribution, location, and extent of the land uses for the area.
2. The proposed distribution, location, extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan.
3. Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable.
4. A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out the plan.
5. A statement of the relationship of the plan to the general plan.

This Specific Plan addresses requirements 1, 3, 4 and 5. As for requirement 2, infrastructure improvements exist in the designated Downtown area and are sufficient for implementation of the Specific Plan.

### **C. Specific Plan Contents**

The Specific Plan includes the following sections:

- Summary of Goals, Policies and Programs which identifies the goals, policies and programs for Downtown Larkspur that are adopted by the City of Larkspur as a part of the Specific Plan;
- Description of the Planning Area, which describes existing conditions in the Downtown;
- Plan Goals and Objectives, which sets the overall planning framework for the Downtown Specific Plan;

- Marketing Element, which suggests the market strategy, types of services, and building types and sizes that can be most readily supported by existing market conditions in the area;
- Land Use Element, which translates framework goals into a specific land use pattern and associated development policies;
- Urban Design Element, which sets forth design concepts, policies and objectives, and translates them into site development standards for building configurations, facade treatments, and landscaping;
- Circulation and Parking Element, which establishes the transportation framework and parking strategy in the Downtown that will accommodate the demands generated by the land use scheme;
- Finance and Implementation Element, which shows methods for financing parking and other improvements under the plan, and outlines possible steps to implement the Specific Plan, including changes to the General Plan and zoning code.
- Analysis of the Specific Plan's Consistency with the City General Plan, which describes how this Specific Plan is consistent with the General Plan.

#### **D. The Planning Process**

The Specific Plan was developed over a nine-month period, with the active cooperation and participation of merchants and land owners in the area. A Specific Plan Steering Committee was formed by the City, consisting of representatives from the Larkspur Community Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the General Plan Citizens Advisory Committee, the Heritage Board, the Design Review Board and the Planning Commission.

The Steering Committee held a series of four public meetings and workshops in the spring and summer of 1991 to make recommendations regarding the Specific Plan. Once a Draft Specific Plan was completed, the review process continued during the fall of 1991, with public hearings held before the Planning Commission and City Council. The Specific Plan was adopted by the City Council on March 3, 1992.

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The planning process has included the following steps:

- a. Walking Tour of the Downtown and Public Scoping Session. As its first step in overseeing the Specific Plan, the Steering Committee, led by the consultant team, attended a walking tour of the Downtown Area. Using the *Walking Tour Workbook*, tour participants were able to become acquainted with all areas of the Downtown and to share their opinions about the area. After the tour, a public scoping session was held, at which the public was invited to share its concerns and ideas about Downtown development.
  - b. Existing Conditions Analysis. An intensive evaluation and analysis of existing and planned conditions in the planning area was conducted in June and July, 1991. The results of the analysis, contained in the *Existing Conditions Report*, described current and anticipated conditions and related issues and concerns relevant to the future use of the planning area. The report focused on market and economic conditions, design opportunities, seismic safety and parking and circulation. The report identified those factors that represent either opportunities or constraints for development in the planning area, and it set the stage for development of alternative planning concepts.
  - c. Goals, Policies and Action Programs. Based on the findings of the *Existing Conditions Report*, the Specific Plan consultant presented draft goals, policies and action programs for the Specific Plan to the Steering Committee. They were revised at the meeting of the Steering Committee. In addition, the existing conditions analysis was also reviewed.
  - d. Alternatives Development and Review. The final step before plan preparation was to develop three design alternatives for the Downtown for review by the Steering Committee and the public. The three alternatives, which were published in the *Alternatives Selection Workbook* in September, 1991, consisted of the following:
    - Urban Vitality Alternative, which showed a maximal intensity of development in the Downtown through construction of relatively large buildings on a variety of sites;
    - Community Improvement Alternative, which continued the types of developments and improvements that are already underway in the Downtown; and
-

- Landscape Alternative, which capitalized on Larkspur's existing natural setting and carried the existing themes of trees and greenery from the southern end of the Downtown into the rest of the area.

Following the review of these alternatives, a more detailed Revised Alternative was developed for the Nazari property, which is a large site at the northern end of the planning area.

The alternatives were reviewed at two Steering Committee meetings at which individual components of the alternatives were selected for inclusion in a preferred alternative for the area. The preferred alternative generally consisted of components of the Community Improvement and Landscape Alternatives, and serves as the basis for this Draft Specific Plan.

#### **E. Specific Plan Approval and Implementation Process**

The following list shows the future procedural steps that will be required to implement the Downtown Specific Plan. Specific implementation measures are described in Chapter IV.

- Zoning Code Revision. City staff will make draft changes to the zoning code, consistent with this Specific Plan, which will be submitted to the Planning Commission and City Council for adoption.
- Public Improvements. Once the Specific Plan is adopted, the City may complete public improvements specified in this plan through the implementation mechanisms described in Chapter VIII.
- Private Projects. Once the Specific Plan is adopted and necessary changes to the Zoning Code are made, land owners and business people in the Downtown may propose changes in use or building projects consistent with this plan.

City staff completed an expanded Initial Study for the Specific Plan, which was circulated with the Draft Specific Plan. The Initial Study met the City's legal requirement to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act before approving the Specific Plan.

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## **Chapter II**

### **SUMMARY OF GOALS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS**

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*This chapter identifies the goals, policies and programs for Downtown Larkspur that are adopted by the City of Larkspur as a part of the Downtown Specific Plan. All text in this chapter that is shown in regular type (without italics) is hereby adopted as City policy. The remainder of the Plan is adopted as an advisory document that supplies background information and gives general guidance to future development in the Downtown.*

#### **I. Specific Plan Goals, Objectives and Programs**

*The following goals, objectives and programs appear on pages 44 through 46 of the Specific Plan, and are intended to guide the future development of the Downtown.*

##### **A. Plan Goals**

1. Preserve the historic, human-scaled, pedestrian-oriented character of the Downtown.
2. Preserve and enhance a mix of commercial, public and institutional, cultural, residential and professional office uses in the Downtown.
3. Enhance and increase the commercial vitality of Downtown.
4. Reinforce the image of the Downtown as the "heart" of Larkspur and as a public gathering place.
5. Create places and activities in the Downtown for all age groups, including teens and children.

##### **B. Plan Objectives and Programs**

1. Improve the economic viability of retail activity in the Downtown.
  - a. Encourage business and property owners to develop a clear marketing strategy for the Downtown as a whole, consistent with the findings of the Specific Plan market study.

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- b. Explore joining the California Main Street Program.
    - c. Encourage a greater role for the Larkspur Community Association in the promotion of the Downtown.
    - d. Promote the Historic District through walking tour flyers and events.
  2. Clearly delineate the boundaries of the Downtown.
    - a. Create a conceptual design for a northern gateway to the Downtown that clearly indicates to motorists when they have entered the area.
    - b. Create a unifying public signage program for the Downtown.
    - c. Work to develop signage directing motorists from Highway 101 to the historic Downtown.
  3. Improve the overall visual and design quality of the Downtown.
    - a. Develop a street tree planting and improvement program for Magnolia Avenue that improves the street's visual image and evenly balances streetscape treatments on each side of the street.
    - b. Develop design guidelines for new construction and building renovation in the Downtown.
    - c. Develop guidelines for pedestrian-scaled private signage in the Downtown.
  4. Improve the sense of connection between the components of the Downtown, including Larkspur Plaza, the Nazari property and the retail core of Downtown, the Lark Creek Shoppes and Larkspur Creek.
    - a. Encourage a connection between the retail center of the downtown north of King Street and the Lark Creek Shoppes.
    - b. Allow for expansion of the Lucky supermarket and development of the Nazari property that will create linkages between these properties and the existing Downtown.
  5. Create a central open space in the Downtown to serve as a public gathering place and town center.
    - a. Include a town square in the conceptual design for the area.
  6. Encourage development of new projects on vacant sites in the Downtown, and include a mixture of uses such as retail, cultural, residential and professional office.
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- a. Revise the zoning code to expressly allow and encourage mixed use projects in the Downtown.
  - b. Explore the possibility of development with owners of large underutilized parcels, including the Roman Catholic Church and Pacific Bell.
  - c. Encourage affordable housing in the Downtown.
7. Maintain the civic and religious functions that currently exist in the Downtown.
- a. Identify a location for an improved post office in the Downtown.
8. Increase access to parking in the Downtown so that visitors will find parking easily and conveniently, and expand the parking supply as necessary to serve current and future uses in the area:
- a. Identify methods to provide additional parking near the Lark Creek Inn.
  - b. Develop a parking district or other mechanisms to ensure provision of adequate parking in the Downtown.
  - c. Revise the parking ordinance in the zoning code for the Downtown.
9. Emphasize the landscape character of the Downtown, particularly in the "Garden Downtown" south of King Street.
- a. Create conceptual designs for open space and linkages along Arroyo Holon between King Street and the Lark Creek Shoppes.
  - b. Maintain and improve the existing bicycle path and connections to it.
  - c. Promote substantial landscaping such as tree canopies in parking lots.
10. Encourage rehabilitation of historic structures in the Downtown so that the number of structures contributing to the historic district increases.
- a. Explore the possibility of rehabilitation incentive programs such as loan funds and historic building tax credits.

### **C. Goals for Individual Properties**

*The following text appears on page 47 through 51 of the Specific Plan and summarizes the City's goals for development on specific parcels that are within the Downtown planning area. Further illustrations and depictions of design possibilities for specific sites are shown on pages 83 through 92 of the Specific*

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*Plan, but the text and illustrations on those pages is not binding on the City or on individual property owners.*

The City has the following goals for individual properties in the Downtown area, which are shown on the Illustrative Plan in Figure 4:

**1. Lucky supermarket.** If the Lucky supermarket expands, the addition shall visually support the creation of a plaza around the railroad buildings on the Nazari property. Loading facilities shall be located so that they will not disrupt the connection between Larkspur Plaza and the Nazari property.

**2. Nazari property.** Goals for this site are:

- Consideration of a public plaza at the corner of Ward and Magnolia.
- Creation of an open space that preserves the context of the historic railroad buildings, with a possible view and pedestrian corridor to them from Magnolia Avenue.
- Development of a Class I bicycle/pedestrian path, with separation of bicyclists from autos in the former railroad right-of-way.
- Placement of storefront and business facades facing Magnolia Avenue and the public open spaces.
- Encouragement of pedestrian connections between Magnolia Avenue, Larkspur Plaza, and public open spaces on the site.
- Prohibition of through vehicle traffic on the railroad right-of-way.
- Coordination of the design of the site with the creation of a northern gateway into the Downtown.
- Creation of a human-scaled building ensemble composed of elements reflecting the architectural scale of existing buildings in the Downtown.

**3. Post Street Area.** The City may develop a paved parking lot on the existing Post Street right-of-way if funding becomes available. The lot should be visually buffered from Magnolia Avenue by a planting area along the street, and should contribute to the establishment of a northern gateway to the Downtown. Development north of Post Street should be encouraged to respect the existing character of adjacent residential properties.

**4. Blue Rock Inn/Larkwood Court.** The City encourages rehabilitation of the Blue Rock Inn that restores its historic character. Construction of a retail

building on the existing parking lot along Magnolia Avenue to fill in the frontage on the street may also be considered.

**5. Catholic Church Property.** The City encourages infill development on the parking lots on either side of Ristorante Fabrizio with mixed-use buildings, particularly including affordable housing. If redevelopment occurs, the new buildings shall create a consistent street edge on Magnolia Avenue except where a small public plaza is encouraged along Magnolia Avenue on a portion of the site of the northern parking lot.

**6. Fendler Property.** The City encourages the construction of a mixed-use building on the Fendler property's vacant Magnolia Avenue frontage, in order to fill in the frontage along the street.

**7. Costello Property.** If a new use is proposed for the Costello residence, the City would prefer that the site be used for a bed-and-breakfast hotel or a cultural facility. The property's house and grounds should remain intact.

**8. Old Eubanks Property.** If the Old Eubanks Building is replaced, the City encourages the new project on the site to include a plaza serving City Hall and the southern Downtown and located at the corner of King and Magnolia.

**9. Pacific Bell Property.** The City encourages the construction of housing at the front of the now vacant Pacific Bell property, and the construction of a publicly accessible parking lot or other facility on the rear portion of the property.

**10. Prahm Property/Arch Street.** If new construction occurs on the Prahm property, it shall be designed to improve the visual image of the existing building on the site, and to eliminate parking in the front of the existing building. The City encourages the construction of a mixed-use project with residential units on the site.

**11. Lark Creek Shoppes.** The City encourages the retention of the unique, small-town character of the Lark Creek Shoppes and the Lark Creek Inn.

The City may develop a parking lot on the vacant Arch Street right-of-way and the lot to the south, provided that funding becomes available. If a parking lot is constructed, the Arch Street steps should be preserved and adequate access from them to Magnolia Avenue should be provided.

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## **II. Land Use, Design and Parking Requirements**

### **A. Findings Regarding the Specific Plan**

No subdivision, use permit, design review application, or other entitlement for use, and no public improvement, will be authorized in the planning area until a finding has been made that the proposed project is in substantial compliance with this Specific Plan. Approval of final development plans and use permits will be contingent upon a determination of substantial compliance with the applicable provisions of the City of Larkspur General Plan and this Specific Plan.

### **B. Land Use Categories and Regulations**

*This text is excerpted from pages 60 through 68 of the Specific Plan. These regulations will be implemented through revisions to the Downtown zoning regulations, as described in section III.C, below.*

The Land Use Plan for the Downtown, which is shown in Figure 5, includes four separate land use categories.

**1. Storefront Downtown.** This designation is intended to continue and enhance the intensive mixed use of the Downtown area that is typically found between Ward and King Streets along Magnolia Avenue. This area is typified by one- and two-story buildings that come to the street, without front or side setbacks. The Storefront Downtown area encompasses most of the northern section of the downtown, above King Street. It also includes the Larkspur Plaza and Nazari properties. Any development or expansion on these properties will be required to follow the regulations of the Storefront Downtown land use category.

Permitted Uses: Retail, restaurant, office, multi-family residential and hotel/inn uses. New single-family residences are not allowed. Ground floor spaces facing Magnolia Avenue generally should have retail uses or uses that generate high amounts of foot traffic, and do not create hazards, nuisances or odors.

Conditional Uses: Uses that may create hazards, nuisances or odors, including entertainment uses, shall require a conditional use permit.

Building Height Limit: Two stories or 25 feet, or taller if deemed appropriate by the Planning Commission under the following qualifications:

- The height of the proposed building will be consistent with the pattern of development in the neighborhood;
- The height exception will result in a building that is either functionally or aesthetically superior to what would have been allowed without the exception;
- The exception will not result in a building with a floor area that is significantly larger than would have been achieved without the exception;
- The proposed exception will not be detrimental to the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of the structure in question, nor be injurious to property or improvements in the neighborhood. The basis for this finding shall include but not be limited to the fact that the proposed building does not block the significant views from the adjoining properties, nor does it significantly impair the access of the adjoining properties to light, air, or insolation nor significantly impair the privacy of adjoining residential properties.

Maximum Floor Area Ratio: .80. Properties currently exceeding the maximum FAR shall not be considered nonconforming. Alteration or reconstruction of such buildings necessitated by damage or destruction to match their original size will be permitted provided that the gross square footage of the original building(s) is not exceeded, that documentation of the square footage of the structure(s) immediately preceding the destruction can be provided, and that the new construction meets all zoning code provisions.

Yard Requirements:

Front Yard: None required. Mandatory zero front setback along Magnolia Avenue and Ward Street, with exceptions for public open space designated under the Specific Plan.

Side Yards: None required. Maximum side setback of 4 feet where buildings face Magnolia Avenue. Rear portions at least 20 feet behind the Magnolia Avenue property line may have wider side setbacks.

Rear Yards: None required, unless lot abuts a lot in a residential zoned district, where minimum rear yard is 10 feet.

Design and Heritage Preservation Board Review. Required for all new construction that modifies the exterior of a building.

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**2. Garden Downtown.** This designation is intended to continue and enhance the non-intensive mixed use of Downtown areas that are south of King Street along Magnolia Avenue. These areas are typified by a mixture of low density residential and commercial uses, and by a large amount of greenery. The intensity of use along Magnolia Avenue that exists north of King Street is not present in this area.

Permitted Uses: Retail, restaurant, office, multi-family residential and hotel/inn uses.

Conditional Uses: Uses that may create hazards, nuisances or odors, including entertainment uses, shall require a conditional use permit.

Building Height Limit: Two stories or 25 feet, whichever is less.

Maximum Floor Area Ratio: .20 as of right, .50 with a conditional use permit. Conditions for an FAR in excess of .20 include provision of adequate parking on site and other mitigating features such as exceptional architectural detailing, public amenities or affordable housing. Properties currently exceeding the maximum FAR shall not be considered nonconforming. Alteration or reconstruction of such buildings necessitated by damage or destruction to match their original size will be permitted provided that the gross square footage of the original building(s) is not exceeded, that documentation of the square footage of the structure(s) immediately preceding the destruction can be provided, and that the new construction meets all zoning code provisions.

Yard Requirements:

Front Yard: None required. Any front yard setback along Magnolia must be landscaped, and may not be used for parking.

Side Yards: None required.

Rear Yards: Not less than 10 feet, with a minimum of 20 feet on a lot that abuts a lot in a residential zoned district.

Design and Heritage Preservation Board Review. Required for all new construction that modifies the exterior of a building.

**3. Transitional Downtown.** This designation is intended to continue and enhance the more modern commercial uses of the northern part of the Downtown, including Larkspur Plaza and the Mount Tam Racquet Club.

These areas are typified by single use commercial and recreational buildings with relatively low building coverage and large amounts of surface parking.

Permitted Uses: Retail, restaurant, office, recreational, multi-family residential and hotel/inn uses.

Conditional Uses: Uses that may create hazards, nuisances or odors, including entertainment uses, shall require a conditional use permit.

Building Height Limit: Two stories or 25 feet, whichever is less.

Maximum Floor Area Ratio: .30 as of right, .40 with a conditional use permit. Conditions for an FAR above .30 include provision of adequate parking on site and other mitigating features such as exceptional architectural detailing, public amenities or affordable housing. Properties currently exceeding the maximum FAR shall not be considered nonconforming. Alteration or reconstruction of such buildings necessitated by damage or destruction to match their original size will be permitted provided that the gross square footage of the original building(s) is not exceeded, that documentation of the square footage of the structure(s) immediately preceding the destruction can be provided, and that the new construction meets all zoning code provisions.

Yard Requirements:

Front Yard: Not less than 20 feet. Front yard setback must include at least 8 feet of landscaping at the property line. The remainder of the setback may be used for parking.

Side Yards: Not less than 6 feet. Not less than 10 feet for a two story building on a lot that abuts a lot in a residential-zoned district.

Rear Yards: Not less than 10 feet, with a minimum of 20 feet on a lot that abuts a lot in a residential-zoned district.

Design Review. Required for all new construction that modifies the exterior of a building.

**4. High Density Residential.** This designation is intended to allow for high density, multi-family residential development. It occurs in areas adjacent to areas already designated for high density residential use, in which residences already exist and where it is desirable to continue strictly residential use.

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The High Density Residential land use designation in this Specific Plan is identical to the High Density Residential designation in the City's General Plan, and includes the following regulations:

Permitted Uses: Single and multi-family residences, public parks and playgrounds, churches and schools.

Conditional Uses: Community clubhouses, childcare, public utilities, businesses incidental to an apartment house, bed-and-breakfast inns and other uses found to be consistent with the high-density residential zone may be allowed if a conditional use permit is granted by the Planning Commission.

Building Height Limit: 35 feet.

Maximum Floor Area Ratio: .60, but lower for properties with a slope greater than 10 percent.

Yard Requirements:

Front Yard: Not less than 15 feet.

Side Yards: Not less than 6 feet. Not less than 10 feet on a corner.

Rear Yards: Not less than 15 feet.

Design and Heritage Preservation Board Review. Design Review Board approval is required for construction that modifies the exterior of a commercial building or multi-family residence. Heritage Preservation Board review is required for construction that modifies the exterior of a building in the Combining Heritage Preservation District.

### **C. Area-wide Design Guidelines**

*The following text is excerpted from pages 77 through 82 of the Specific Plan. These guidelines are to be used by City boards, the Planning Commission and the City Council when evaluating Downtown development proposals, and are strictly advisory and not binding.*

The guiding design concepts for the Downtown are:

1. To provide a distinct, cohesive image for the Downtown.
2. To maintain and enhance the intimate human scale and existing historical urban fabric.

3. To provide public gathering spaces at plazas and in natural areas.
4. To provide for landscaping in the Downtown that reinforces Larkspur's strong connection to the natural landscape.

This section contains design guidelines for all parcels in the Downtown's Storefront and Garden Downtown districts. For ease of reference, the guidelines are broken down according to the two districts, and are repeated where they are the same in both districts.

The City's existing design guidelines, which are found in Chapter 18.64 of the Zoning Code, are the only general guidelines that apply in the Transitional Downtown and High Density Residential land use designations. Section 18.64 will also continue to apply in the Storefront and Garden Downtown districts, to the extent that the guidelines in that section are consistent with the design guidelines in this Specific Plan. Where there are conflicts between the two sets of guidelines, this Specific Plan will prevail.

Historic structures in the Downtown listed on the City's Historic Resources Inventory are also subject to the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines administered by the Heritage Preservation Board.

**1. Storefront Downtown.** The following design guidelines are applicable to all new construction and exterior building renovations in the Storefront Downtown:

- (1) Where buildings front on Magnolia Avenue, the ground floor of each building should have visually permeable shop frontages with large windows. Upper floors should have smaller window openings punched into solid walls.
  - (2) Buildings should follow the pattern of bays found in the neighborhood. Large buildings should be articulated as several bays.
  - (3) Buildings should be one or two stories tall, with a maximum height of 25 feet.
  - (4) Where buildings front on Magnolia Avenue, they should be built to the lot line and the sidewalk, without intervening vegetation or parking, except on specific sites where public plazas are foreseen in the Specific Plan.
  - (5) Ground floor facades should include pedestrian-scaled detailing including vertical windows and overhanging awnings.
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(6) Unless a building is designed to reflect a certain historic period during which detailing was minimized, all facades should include three-dimensional detailing, such as cornices, window moldings and reveals to cast shadows and create visual interest on the facade.

(7) Facades should include indentations for entries, product display and/or seating. In some locations, retail and cafe uses can also spill out onto the sidewalk.

(8) In most cases, buildings should have parapets that create the visual effect of a "flat roof" along Magnolia Avenue, and roof lines should be detailed or adorned for visual interest. Peaked or unusual roof shapes are appropriate on buildings that play a particularly prominent role in the area.

(9) If large commercial spaces are required at the ground floor, they should be set back from the street so they can be lined with shallow, smaller retail spaces or similar uses along the street. The presence of these large spaces on the street should be consistent with existing small shops.

(10) Building facades should generally be constructed of materials already used in the area, such as horizontal tongue-and-groove wood siding, painted wood shingles, high-quality stucco and red brick. The following types of materials are not appropriate:

- Highly finished materials such as polished metal and reflective glass, except as accents.
- Manmade materials intended to mimic natural materials, such as composition wood paneling or shingles.
- Extremely rustic materials such as unfinished wood.

(11) Building colors in the Downtown can be relatively bright, and may include earth tones and pastels.

(12) Parking and service areas should be accommodated away from Magnolia Avenue, either behind buildings or below grade.

**2. Garden Downtown.** The following design guidelines are applicable to all new construction and exterior building renovations in the Garden Downtown:

(1) Buildings should follow the pattern of small buildings found in the neighborhood. Large buildings should be articulated as several bays.

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- (2) Buildings should be one or two stories tall, with a maximum height of 25 feet.
- (3) Buildings should be built to the lot line and the sidewalk, or they should have landscaped front yards with vegetation or plaza space.
- (4) Ground level facades should include pedestrian-scaled detailing including vertical windows and overhanging awnings.
- (5) Unless a building is designed to reflect a certain historic period during which building detailing was minimized, all facades should include three-dimensional detailing, such as cornices, window moldings and reveals to cast shadows and create visual interest on the facade.
- (6) Facades should include indentations for entries, product display and/or seating. In some places, retail and cafe uses can also spill out onto the sidewalk.
- (7) Buildings may have parapets that create the visual effect of a "flat roof" along Magnolia Avenue, and roof lines should be detailed or adorned for visual interest. Gabled roofs with their peaks facing Magnolia Avenue are also acceptable.
- (8) If large commercial spaces are required at the ground floor, they should be set back from the street so they can be lined with shallow, smaller retail spaces or similar uses along the street. The presence of these large spaces on the street should be consistent with existing small shops.
- (9) Building facades should generally be constructed of materials already used in the area, such as horizontal tongue-and-groove wood siding, painted wood shingles, high-quality stucco and red brick. Rustic materials such as unfinished wood may be used on buildings that are appropriately landscaped and set back from the street in a "garden" atmosphere. The following types of materials are not appropriate:
- Highly finished materials such as polished metal and reflective glass, except as accents.
  - Manmade materials intended to mimic natural materials, such as composition wood paneling or shingles.
- (10) Building colors in the Downtown can be relatively bright, and may include earth tones and pastels.
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(11) Parking and service areas should be accommodated away from Magnolia Avenue, either behind buildings or below grade.

#### **D. Revised Parking Requirements**

*The following text is excerpted from pages 101 through 103 of the Specific Plan. These parking requirements will be implemented through revisions to the parking regulations contained in the City's zoning ordinance, as described in section III.C, below.*

The Specific Plan revises the parking requirements for the Downtown Area, as shown in Table 1. The revised parking replace all existing City parking requirements in the Downtown, including the requirement that new uses demand equal or less parking than the previous uses in a building.

In this section, the term "use" refers to the type of land use, such as retail, restaurant or office, and not to specific types of stores or tenants within these categories.

The parking requirements are applied in two different ways within the Downtown, as described below:

##### **a. Storefront Downtown.**

(1) Application to New Construction. All new construction or building additions in the Storefront Downtown must supply parking at the rates shown in Table 1, either on- or off-site, or through other methods found acceptable by the City, with the following exceptions:

- Retail or office additions to existing buildings in the Storefront Downtown that do not increase the total building area on site to a Floor Area Ratio greater than .80 need not supply additional parking on site, provided that no parking is removed from the site as a part of the project.
- Newly constructed restaurant space in a building that does not exceed a total FAR of .80 is required to supply 4.4 spaces per 1,000 square feet.

(2) Application to Existing Buildings. The parking requirements shown in Table 1 generally do not apply to existing buildings in the Storefront Downtown. Existing buildings may accommodate any use. However, the following exceptional uses in existing buildings require provision of additional

**Table 1**  
**Downtown Parking Requirements**

Use	Requirement
Retail	2.6 spaces per 1,000 square feet
Restaurant	7.0 spaces per 1,000 square feet <sup>a</sup>
Office	2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet
Residential	1.0 space per dwelling unit

<sup>a</sup> Some exceptions apply in the Storefront Downtown, where only 4.4 spaces per 1,000 square feet are required. See text for explanation.

parking on- or off-site, or compliance with other parking supply measures deemed appropriate by the City:

- Changes to residential use must supply one parking space for each unit.
- Changes to hotel/inn use must supply one parking space for each room.
- New restaurants must supply 4.4 spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area. Existing restaurants, and new restaurants that are established in buildings whose current use is a restaurant, do not need to fulfill this requirement, and may rely on the existing parking supply.

b. Garden and Transitional Downtown. The parking requirements shown in Table 1 apply to all existing buildings and new construction in the Garden and Transitional Downtown districts.

- For a change of use in an existing building, applicants must show that all uses on their site will have adequate parking, either on site or through compliance with other parking supply measures deemed appropriate by the City.
- For new construction, adequate parking to serve all uses in the project must be supplied on site or through other parking supply measures deemed appropriate by the City.

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### III. City Programs

*The programs listed below are outlined in detail in various sections of the Specific Plan. These programs may be implemented through City action once the Specific Plan is adopted.*

#### A. Landscape Improvements

As a part of the Specific Plan, the City may complete a set of public landscape improvements that create a more unified streetscape in the Downtown, including street trees, decorative paving, gateway treatments and street furniture. Completion of the improvements is contingent on funds becoming available, as described in Chapter VIII of the Specific Plan, and under section III.E, below. *Individual components of the landscape program are described on pages 72 through 75 of the Specific Plan, and are illustrated in Figure 6 of the Plan.*

#### B. Circulation Improvements

*The following text is excerpted from pages 93 through 99 of the Specific Plan. Potential vehicle circulation improvements are mapped in Figure 7 of the Specific Plan.*

**1. Vehicular Circulation Improvements.** Under the Specific Plan, Magnolia Avenue will continue to function as the only through arterial in the Downtown. No new north-south streets will be constructed. Rice Lane will continue to function only as a one-way alley providing access for parking, service, and the improvements to the railroad right-of-way on the Nazari property should not allow for through vehicle circulation between Larkspur Plaza and Ward Street.

The City may evaluate operation of Magnolia Avenue in the future, with the possibility of making changes to intersection controls. If traffic volumes continue to increase, the King Street/Magnolia Avenue intersection may warrant signalization. However, any changes to intersection control on Magnolia Avenue must make pedestrian circulation and safety a primary consideration. Traffic improvements must balance local pedestrian and vehicle circulation needs with the needs of through traffic.

**2. Bicycle Circulation Improvements.** The main focus of Downtown bicycle circulation improvements will be on the Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way. The City may require the developers of the Nazari property to retain and improve a bike path on this property.

At the northern end of the Downtown, the bicycle path may be realigned through the City property adjacent to Larkspur Plaza to allow for smoother bicycle circulation. On the north leg of the intersection, outside the Specific Plan area, the City will also explore restriping Magnolia Avenue to create a bike lane connecting to the existing bike path along Corte Madera Creek. The City will also explore creation of a bike path along Doherty Drive to Redwood High School.

**3. Pedestrian Circulation Improvements.** Most policies and actions that would improve pedestrian circulation under the Specific Plan are outlined in other sections of this document. In addition, the City will continue to evaluate the need for additional crosswalks and other pedestrian amenities. This Specific Plan suggests construction of new crosswalks at the Post Street and Arch Street parking lots to facilitate crossing to the east side of the street. These crosswalks would be designed to match the brick and concrete crosswalks that were recently installed with the Magnolia Avenue reconstruction project.

#### **C. Changes to the Zoning Code**

To bring City zoning codes within the planning area into consistency with this Specific Plan and ensure effective implementation of design and development standards, the City will incorporate into its zoning code the land use and parking specifications found in Chapters IV.D, VI and VIII of the Specific Plan, and reprinted in Sections I.C, II.B and II.D of this chapter.

#### **D. Creation of a Private Signage Ordinance**

The City of Larkspur may enact a private signage ordinance that sets guidelines for pedestrian-oriented private signage in the Downtown. The ordinance would allow for signage consistent with the historic, pedestrian-scaled character of the Downtown, and would set clear guidelines regarding size, color, materials and methods of attachment for signs. Once developed, the signage ordinance would be adopted as a part of the City's zoning code.

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**E. Landscaping Finance**

The City may fund public improvements required under the Specific Plan through a Landscaping and Lighting District, which the City would attempt to establish pursuant to the State Landscaping and Lighting Act of 1972 or other similar enabling legislation, or through another funding mechanism. *More information regarding the potential Landscaping and Lighting District is included on pages 112 and 113 of the Specific Plan.*

**F. Parking Finance**

The City may meet the costs for parking provision through mechanisms such as a Parking Assessment District or other parking supply measures. *More information regarding the potential Parking Assessment District is included on pages 113 through 116 of the Specific Plan.*

**G. City Initiative in Private Projects**

The City of Larkspur is willing to cooperate with landowners either by initiating projects and negotiating with land owners regarding improvements to be completed, or by encouraging land owners to undertake projects that will benefit the community as a whole. *Specific sites where City initiative and negotiations will be necessary are described on pages 117 and 118 of the Specific Plan.*

**H. California Main Street Program**

The City will consider participation in the California Main Street Program such as purchasing audiovisual materials and books through the program, utilizing a lending library kept by staff at the California Main Street office, and tracking the program for possible reapplication in 1994. *The program is described in more detail on pages 119 and 120 of the Specific Plan.*

**I. Coordination with the Larkspur Community Association**

The Larkspur Community Association (LCA) is an organization of business owners, homeowners and community members in the Downtown that

represents an important resource for improving and marketing the Downtown. City staff will maintain regular contact with the LCA or any successor organization to monitor business needs in the Downtown, and will work with LCA representatives in the implementation of Specific Plan programs, such as the selection of street furniture and the development of a signage ordinance. The City's Heritage Committee will work with LCA to provide walking tours of the Downtown and to sponsor special historic events.

#### **J. Public Signage Program**

As funds become available, the City may hire a consultant to create a public signage program for the Downtown. Such a program would include directional and traffic signs and signs to mark the entries to the Downtown on Magnolia Avenue. The materials and motifs employed in the signage program shall be of a high quality, and shall reflect both Downtown Larkspur's historical character and a connection to the natural environment. This program might be completed through the Landscaping and Lighting District.

#### **K. Freeway Signage**

The City may work with Caltrans and adjacent cities to install signage on Highway 101 and on surface streets leading to the Downtown that would direct motorists to the Historic Downtown area.

#### **L. Historic Structure Renovation Program**

The City will consider establishing a revolving loan fund for historic facade renovation, and will encourage utilization of federal historic preservation tax credits. *These programs are described in more detail on pages 121 and 122 of the Specific Plan.*



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## **Chapter III**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA**

■ ■ ■

#### **A. Regional Location**

The City of Larkspur and its Downtown are situated in the southern portion of Marin County, below Mt. Tamalpais and about 14 miles north of San Francisco. The city has numerous natural and manmade amenities, including a hilly topography, lush vegetation, mild climate, access to Richardson Bay and the Pacific Ocean, transportation access via Highway 101 and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, well-maintained housing stock, and numerous historic buildings. These amenities render Larkspur a desirable place to live, work, and shop.

#### **B. Local Setting**

The Downtown Area under review in the Specific Plan process is shown in Figure 1 and encompasses parcels lining the town's main street, Magnolia Avenue, from Doherty Drive to William Avenue. It contains a mixture of land uses, including retail and restaurant, office, residential, and public/quasi-public facilities. Land ownership and uses in the area are shown in Table 2, which is keyed to Figure 2.

At the northern end of downtown, the Larkspur Plaza Shopping Center, anchored by a Lucky supermarket, provides residents and visitors with a variety of stores such as a dry cleaners, an ice cream parlor and a drug store. This shopping center is configured as a contemporary suburban center with substantial parking facilities fronting the major roadways.

The balance of downtown Larkspur has a much more historic appearance than Larkspur Plaza, reflecting the community's early development as a resort community on a rail line. Buildings with historic facades are located adjacent to tree-lined sidewalks; parking is provided either along the side of or to the rear of many of the buildings. In general, with the exception of Larkspur Plaza, the downtown is pedestrian-oriented with a charming historic ambiance.

The downtown area from Post Street to William Avenue has been designated as an Historic District and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Key existing buildings in Downtown Larkspur include the Lark Theater, the Blue Rock Inn, located at the Downtown's main intersection of Ward Street and Magnolia Avenue, two historic railroad station buildings, Larkspur City Hall and fire station, St. Patrick's Church and School, and the nationally-renowned Lark Creek Inn restaurant. Interspersed among these key parcels are numerous buildings with ground floor retail or restaurant uses; several of these buildings contain second-story office or residential uses. Retail uses include restaurants, hair salons, bookstores, shoe repair, florists, and a bakery.

About 680 parking spaces in Downtown Larkspur serve retail and restaurant patrons, employees, residents, City Hall visitors, and church attendees. About 100 on-street spaces on Magnolia and the various side streets provide short-term parking for shoppers and other visitors to the area. Off-street parking is located at a public lot at Ward and Magnolia, at one large lot at Larkspur Plaza, and at a multitude of smaller lots throughout downtown.

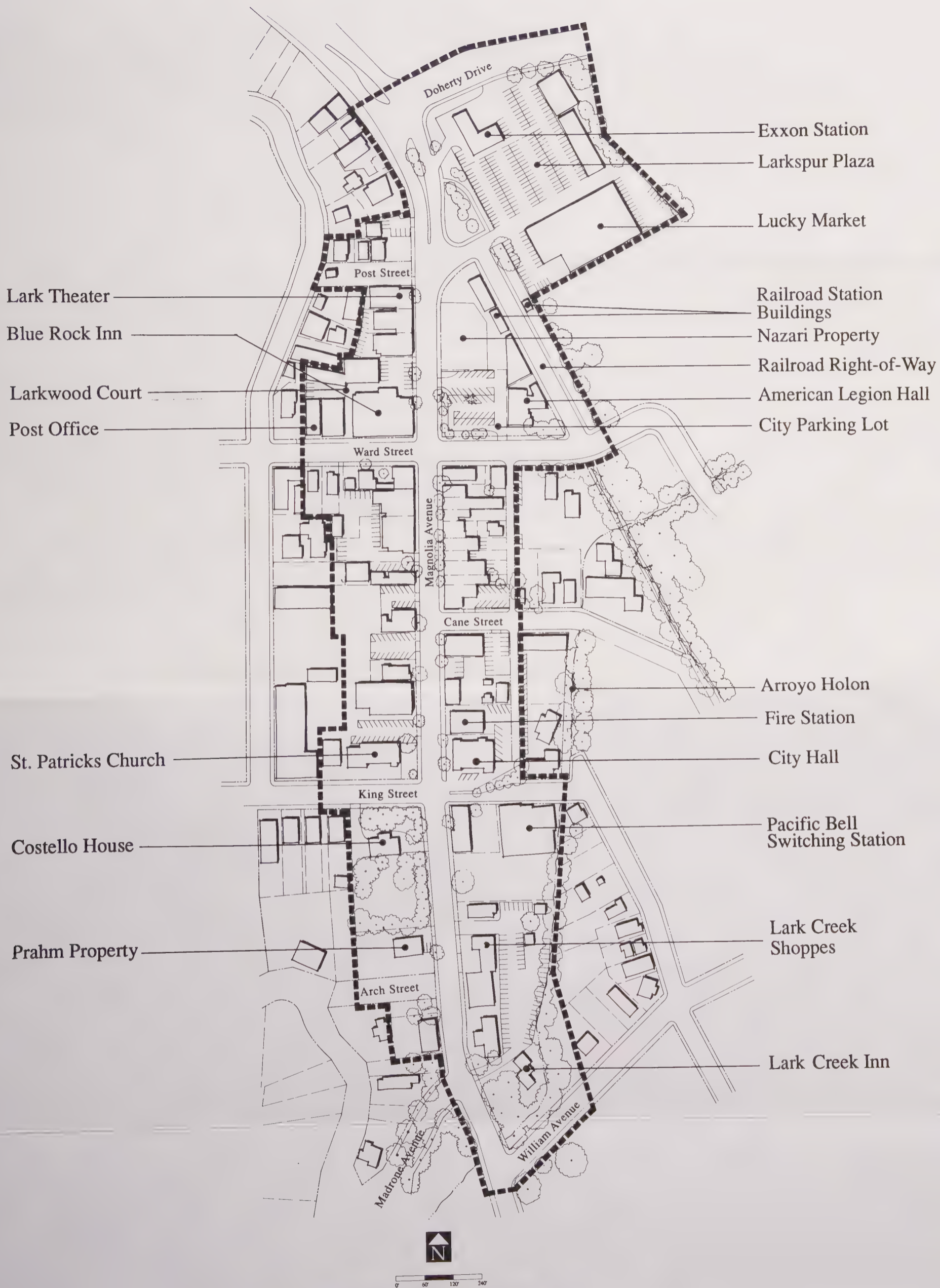
In its function, Downtown Larkspur can be described as having some of the characteristics as a regional shopping mall. Both ends of the area are anchored by facilities drawing large numbers of customers: Larkspur Plaza to the north and the Lark Creek Inn to the south. Between the two anchors, Downtown Larkspur contains numerous smaller shops and service providers organized along a central path, Magnolia Avenue. The Downtown's length of about 2,500 feet is roughly equivalent to the length of a regional shopping mall.

However, Downtown Larkspur diverges from the regional shopping mall in many important respects. The form of the Downtown is significantly different, since it accommodates vehicular traffic and pedestrians, and since the street is a public space rather than a privately controlled one. There is also a mixture of uses in the Downtown, including residences and offices, whereas a shopping mall has strictly retail uses. In all these ways, the Downtown offers a much greater richness and variety than a mall.

Moreover, the two anchors in the Downtown attract different shoppers for different purposes. The convenient, automobile-oriented Larkspur Plaza is patronized by local residents who generally arrive by car, shop and then leave without walking to other parts of the Downtown. In contrast, patrons of the Lark Creek Inn arrive by car from all over the region for an extended dining

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Figure 1 Study Area



LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN



Figure 2 Land Ownership



LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN



**Table 2**  
**DOWNTOWN LAND OWNERS AND LAND USES**

Map Number	Owner	Retail		Office	Single-Family Units	Multi-Family Units	Other Uses
		Total Square Feet	Stores				
1	Exxon Corp.	n/a					Service Station
2	Andrews and Associates	8,200	Baskin-Robbins Dry Cleaners Laundromat MD Drugs Red Boy Pizza Sakura Restaurant Cafe				
3	Laborers Pension Fund	23,400 2,500	Lucky Vacant shop				
4	City of Larkspur			8,000			Triangular landscape area City parking lot Fire Station City Hall Vacant lot at Arch Street
5	Shawn Nazari	7,500	Vacant building Video Monde Teate Glass Sidewalk Cafe				Includes vacant lot
6	American Legion						American Legion Hall (4,000 square feet)
7	Janet Sternberger				1	4	
8	Joan B. Eckert				1		
9	Heinz Glembotzki				1		
10	Nathan Blumenfeld						Lark Theater (5,026 square feet)

Table 2 (continued)

Map Number	Owner	Retail		Office	Single-Family Units	Multi-Family Units	Other Uses
		Total Square Feet	Stores				
11	Leatrice Kobuchi	7,200	Coyote Restaurant Hair Salon Recovery Resources	5,400		Approx. 3	
12	Jerome Bernal	2,150 5,000	Post Office Blue Rock Inn			53	
13	Lindsay Mickles			1,400	1		
14	Elaine Friedman	2,520	Jessup Orange Works & Cabaret Stacey's Bloomers All About Chairs			2	
15	Linda Nicol	4,000	Red Robin Catering			2	
16	Ernest Epidendio	5,000	Rainbow Market Delectable Deli Studio 4 Larkspur Barber			3	
17	465 Magnolia Partners	3,150	Miranda Shoe Repair Carousel Laundry Donut Alley Vacant	4,950			
18	Roman Catholic Church	2,700	Ristorante Fabrizio Thrift Store	4,000			St. Patrick's Church St. Patrick's School Parking lots

Table 2 (continued)

Map Number	Owner	Retail		Office	Single-Family Units	Multi-Family Units	Other Uses
		Total Square Feet	Stores				
19	Jin Wu, et al.	1,600	CJ Chinese		1		
20	Tiscornia Estate Co.	2,100	Atlantic Financial				
21	Arnold Leo, Jr.			2,800			
22	David Manahan			1,600		1	
23	Richard Bender			3,000			
24	Gary Howell	1,200	Country Gardens			1	
25	Philip Bundschu	1,700	Vacant (formerly Casa de Art)			1	
26	Bruce Eriksen				1		
27	Patrick Rauber	2,100	Eubanks Florist				
28	James Canepa	1,500	Nathan Galleries				
29	Richard Robbins	2,400	Pasticceria Rulli				
30	Mary Jane Dunstan	1,500	Artist's Proof Books			2	
31	Frank Janda	2,850	Silver Peso Bar			2	
32	Dorothy Rohnert Spreckels			4,300			
33	Theodore & Fred Fendler			2,000 (dental office)		3	
34	Barbara Costello James Costello				1		

Table 2 (continued)

Map Number	Owner	Retail		Office	Single-Family Units	Multi-Family Units	Other Uses
		Total Square Feet	Stores				
35	Ole Prahm			1,800			Vacant lot
36	Enos Inter Vivos					4	
37	West Trust	3,300	Vacant (formerly Eubanks Florist) DJ Hair Care Laundromat				
38	Pacific Bell						Phone switching station (partially undeveloped lot)
39	Sue Schaefer	10,200	Lark Creek Shoppes: Lingerie Shop Touch of Flair Barber/Beauty Sandy's Custom Kitchens Larkspur Books & Office Dandelion Custom Furniture Rhett's Shoe Repair Body Heat Olivia's Skin Care John Coslyn Flowers El Nido Restaurant Lark Creek Inn	2,100			
<b><u>TOTALS</u></b>		<b>103,770</b>		<b>41,350</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>81</b>	

experience. Perhaps even more importantly, visitors to both these anchor facilities have little reason to visit the rest of the Downtown that lies between them. There is no connection between the two anchors (they do not offer related goods or services), and the anchors' customers generally do not perceived themselves as visiting a larger shopping area than their single destination. Thus, the two anchors do not function in a complementary manner or generate pedestrian traffic for the smaller stores between them.

### C. Development Opportunities

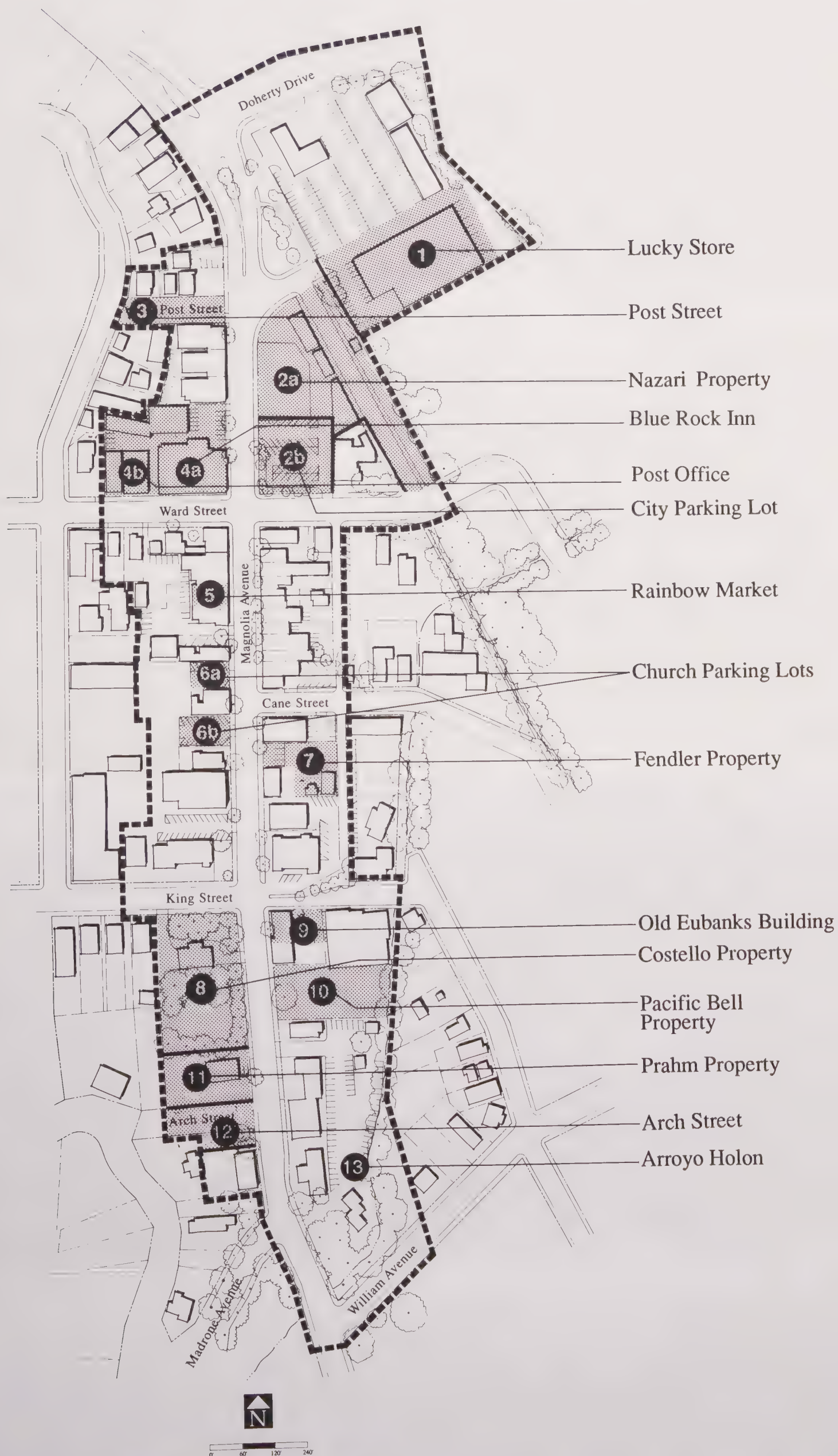
The following text summarizes site characteristics that present constraints and opportunities to the location and type of development that can be accommodated in the area. The opportunity sites are mapped in Figure 3, which includes numbers keyed to the description below:

1. **Lucky Supermarket.** The Lucky Supermarket has submitted preliminary plans to expand its existing store. The expansion would present an opportunity to design building facades on the market's west side, thereby creating a potential pedestrian link from Larkspur Plaza to the Downtown.
- 2a. **Nazari Property.** This mostly vacant property is the largest opportunity site in the Downtown. It includes two historic buildings that served as a railroad station. The owner, Mr. Nazari, hopes to build a mixed use project on the site with an area of 40,000 to 50,000 square feet, including retail space on the ground floor and residences or offices above. This may also be an appropriate location for a post office, as described under 4b, below.
- 2b. **City Parking Lot.** Since the City parking lot at the corner of Ward and Magnolia is located at the most significant intersection in the Downtown, this site might be more appropriate for a building than a parking lot, or it might serve as a focal open space for the city. The City General Plan recommends a town square on this block.
3. **Post Street.** This unpaved "paper street", located at the far north of the Downtown adjacent to single-family residences, may be suitable for a parking lot or infill housing.
- 4a. **Blue Rock Inn/Larkwood Court.** This site contains the Blue Rock Inn restaurant, Larkwood Court apartments and the post office. The urban design character of these buildings is marginal. The site and buildings present an opportunity to make changes to the exterior of the Blue Rock Inn to make it look more like the original, and to replace or

renovate the Larkwood apartments to include more vegetation and a greater presence on Magnolia north of the Blue Rock Inn.

- 4b. **The Post Office.** The U.S. Postal Service recently signed a three-year lease on its current quarters, but has expressed some interest in finding an alternative location for the post office in the future. The Postal Service should be encouraged to keep its facility in the Downtown if possible.
5. **Rainbow Market.** This is one of the largest and most centrally located retail spaces in the traditional retail core of Downtown Larkspur. A better stocked and operated market, or another business such as a restaurant, produce store or specialty shop, would be appropriate at this location to bring more vitality to the Downtown.
6. **Catholic Church Parking Lots.** These two parking lots, part of the St. Patrick's Church and School complex, create significant gaps in the strong edge of facades along Magnolia Avenue. Infill projects on these sites, such as subsidized housing or market rate mixed-use projects, may be appropriate.
7. **Fendler Property.** The rear portions of these sites might be appropriate for infill housing or parking, while the frontage on Magnolia should be developed with a mixed-use project with retail on the ground floor to fill in the retail facade on Magnolia Avenue.
8. **Costello Residential Property.** The Costello's currently have no interest in changing their use of the site, but if their plans change, this parcel might be most appropriately targeted as a bed-and-breakfast hotel or a cultural facility. Any new use on the site should retain the historic house and grounds intact, but make them more accessible to the public.
9. **Old Eubanks Building.** This recently vacated building has been identified as the only unreinforced masonry building in the Downtown in need of extensive seismic safety upgrading. It may be more appropriate to replace it with a new, multi-story building with retail space on its ground floor and offices or residences above. Such a project may include the replacement of the adjacent DJ Hair and laundromat building next door, which are on the same parcel.
10. **Pacific Bell Property.** The portion of the parcel which fronts on Magnolia Avenue is vacant and represents a significant hole in the Downtown's urban fabric. The Telephone Company should be encouraged to develop a project on this site, either with mixed uses or

Figure 3 Opportunity Sites



LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN



as an exclusively residential project. It may also be possible to create a "back way" pedestrian access way to link the Lark Creek Shoppes with King Street and City Hall, and/or a Downtown public open space with access to Arroyo Holon.

11. **Prahm Property.** Ole Prahm, the parcels' owner, has developed plans to construct a total of 4,200 square feet of office space, a one-bedroom apartment and 19 parking spaces on the site.
12. **Arch Street and Adjacent Lot.** These parcels have been acquired by the City for development into a parking lot. They have also been identified as a potential site for an infill building or a public "pocket park."
13. **Arroyo Holon.** Arroyo Holon is a creek that runs along the edge the Downtown. It is an existing natural corridor with tree cover and a pleasant character, and would be appropriate to exploit more fully by creating linkages to it, a walkway along it, and small plazas or gathering places near it.



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## **Chapter IV**

### **THE VISION FOR THE DOWNTOWN**



This chapter outlines the vision for Downtown Larkspur that underlies the Downtown Specific Plan. It includes a statement of the overall vision for the Downtown, as well as lists of goals, policies and programs for the Specific Plan. The vision, goals, policies and programs are depicted in an Illustrative Plan of ultimate development under the Specific Plan, which is described at the end of this chapter.

#### **A. The Vision**

Imagine yourself in a Downtown Larkspur that is filled with bustling shops, office workers and visitors. Residents and visitors walk, shop, and dine; they linger on the sidewalks and in intimate plazas. They shop for food and housewares at stores and boutiques, and visit special events like art fairs and small concerts on the town square. At night, they can choose from a variety of entertainment possibilities: movies, the cabaret, cafes and clubs.

The buildings in this Downtown Larkspur maintain the historic character of an early Marin County town, but new development has occurred as well. Older buildings are rehabilitated, while new projects reinforce Magnolia Avenue's image as Larkspur's traditional heart. Lush landscaping abounds, and the town's landmark redwood trees create gateways at both ends of Magnolia.

This is the vision for Downtown Larkspur that the Downtown Specific Plan is intended to realize. The plan builds on the existing strengths and weaknesses of the area, taking advantage of the existing building stock, planning for new buildings on underutilized sites, reinforcing the existing urban form, and creating places for the activities that are likely to occur under current market realities.

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## **B. Plan Goals**

Most of the following goals are derived from the Larkspur General Plan. They are consistent with the existing conditions in the Downtown, and represent the overall goals for the Downtown Specific Plan.

1. Preserve the historic, human-scaled, pedestrian-oriented character of the Downtown.
2. Preserve and enhance the mix of commercial, public and institutional, cultural, residential and professional office uses in the Downtown.
3. Enhance and increase the commercial vitality of Downtown.
4. Reinforce the image of the Downtown as the "heart" of Larkspur and as a public gathering place.
5. Create places and activities in the Downtown for all age groups, including teens and children.

## **C. Plan Objectives and Programs**

The following objectives are derived from existing conditions identified in the planning process, and are intended to strengthen and enliven the Downtown while maintaining the area's existing character.

1. Improve the economic viability of retail activity in the Downtown.
  - a. Encourage business and property owners to develop a clear marketing strategy for the Downtown as a whole, consistent with the findings of the Specific Plan market study.
  - b. Explore joining the California Main Street Program.
  - c. Encourage a greater role for the Larkspur Community Association in the promotion of the Downtown.
  - d. Promote the Historic District through walking tour flyers and events.
2. Clearly delineate the boundaries of the Downtown.
  - a. Create a conceptual design for a northern gateway to the Downtown that clearly indicates to motorists when they have entered the area.
  - b. Create a unifying public signage program for the Downtown.
  - c. Work to develop signage directing motorists from Highway 101 to the historic Downtown.

- 
3. Improve the overall visual and design quality of the Downtown.
    - a. Develop a street tree planting and improvement program for Magnolia Avenue that improves the street's visual image and evenly balances streetscape treatments on each side of the street.
    - b. Develop design guidelines for new construction and building renovation in the Downtown.
    - c. Develop guidelines for pedestrian-scaled private signage in the Downtown.
  4. Improve the sense of connection between the components of the Downtown, including Larkspur Plaza, the Nazari property and the retail core of Downtown, the Lark Creek Shoppes and Larkspur Creek.
    - a. Encourage a connection between the retail center of the downtown north of King Street and the Lark Creek Shoppes.
    - b. Allow for expansion of the Lucky supermarket and development of the Nazari property that will create linkages between these properties and the existing Downtown.
  5. Create a central open space in the Downtown to serve as a public gathering place and town center.
    - a. Include a town square in the conceptual design for the area.
  6. Encourage development of new projects on vacant sites in the Downtown, and include a mixture of uses such as retail, cultural, residential and professional office.
    - a. Revise the zoning code to expressly allow and encourage mixed use projects in the Downtown.
    - b. Explore the possibility of development with owners of large underutilized parcels, including the Roman Catholic Church and Pacific Bell.
    - c. Encourage affordable housing in the Downtown.
  7. Maintain the civic and religious functions that currently exist in the Downtown.
    - a. Identify a location for an improved post office in the Downtown.
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8. Increase access to parking in the Downtown so that visitors will find parking easily and conveniently, and expand the parking supply as necessary to serve current and future uses in the area:
    - a. Identify methods to provide additional parking near the Lark Creek Inn.
    - b. Develop a parking district or other mechanisms to ensure provision of adequate parking in the Downtown.
    - c. Revise the parking ordinance in the zoning code for the Downtown.
  9. Emphasize the landscape character of the Downtown, particularly in the "Garden Downtown" south of King Street.
    - a. Create conceptual designs for open space and linkages along Arroyo Holon between King Street and the Lark Creek Shoppes.
    - b. Maintain and improve the existing bicycle path and connections to it.
    - c. Promote substantial landscaping such as tree canopies in parking lots.
  10. Encourage rehabilitation of historic structures in the Downtown so that the number of structures contributing to the historic district increases.
    - a. Explore the possibility of rehabilitation incentive programs such as loan funds and historic building tax credits.

#### **D. Illustrative Plan of the Downtown**

Based on the vision, goals and objectives outlined above, the Specific Plan Steering Committee reviewed several alternatives for development in the Downtown, and selected a preferred alternative for the area. This preferred alternative is shown as the Illustrative Plan of the Downtown in Figure 4.

The Illustrative Plan indicates the overall design direction for the Downtown; it is not intended to specify actual projects that will be built in the area, and does not bind either the City or any private property owners to building specific projects. However, the Illustrative Plan has served as the basis for land use and parking projections in this Specific Plan. For this reason, the City will give especially careful review to any projects that exceed the parameters shown in the Illustrative Plan.

The illustrative plan also shows plantings and improvements resulting from a City Street Tree and Landscape Program. Under this program, Magnolia Avenue would be planted with consistently spaced street trees, and improved benches, trash cans and other street furniture would be installed. The City would also install landmark redwood trees, signage and special paving to mark the northern and southern entries to the Downtown. This program will require separate implementation by the City of Larkspur.

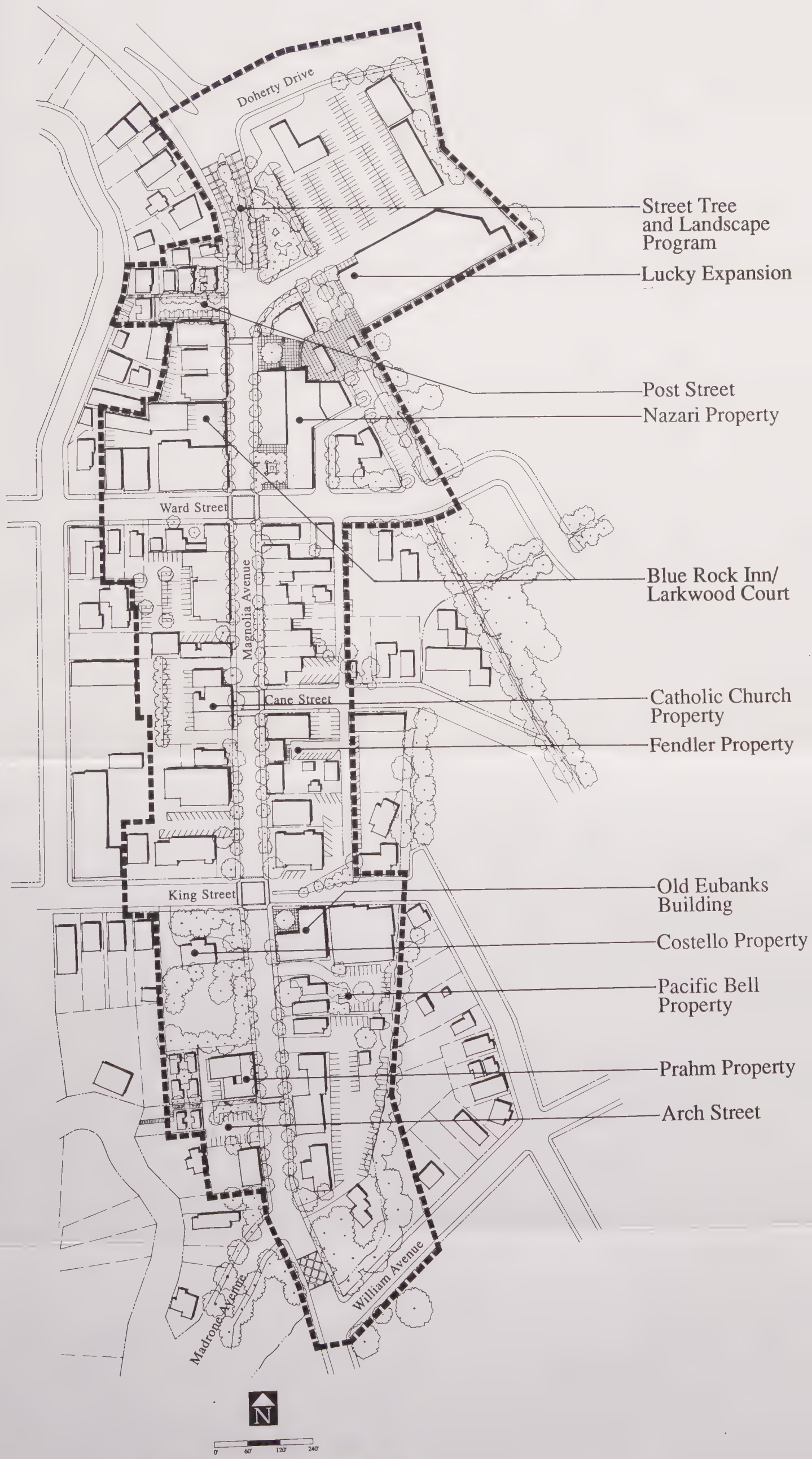
### **E. Goals for Individual Properties**

Based on the input of the Steering Committee and individual property owners, and on the projects shown in the Illustrative Plan, the City has adopted the following design and development goals for individual properties in the Downtown:

- 1. Lucky supermarket.** If the Lucky supermarket expands, the addition shall visually support the creation of a plaza around the railroad buildings on the Nazari property. Loading facilities shall be located so that they will not disrupt the connection between Larkspur Plaza and the Nazari property.
  - 2. Nazari property.** Goals for this site are:
    - Consideration of a public plaza at the corner of Ward and Magnolia.
    - Creation of an open space that preserves the context of the historic railroad buildings, with a possible view and pedestrian corridor to them from Magnolia Avenue.
    - Development of a Class I bicycle/pedestrian path, with separation of bicyclists from autos in the former railroad right-of-way.
    - Placement of storefront and business facades facing Magnolia Avenue and the public open spaces.
    - Encouragement of pedestrian connections between Magnolia Avenue, Larkspur Plaza, and public open spaces on the site.
    - Prohibition of through vehicle traffic on the railroad right-of-way.
    - Coordination of the design of the site with the creation of a northern gateway into the Downtown.
    - Creation of a human-scaled building ensemble composed of elements reflecting the architectural scale of existing buildings in the Downtown.
-

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3. **Post Street Area.** The City may develop a paved parking lot on the existing Post Street right-of-way if funding becomes available. The lot should be visually buffered from Magnolia Avenue by a planting area along the street, and should contribute to the establishment of a northern gateway to the Downtown. Development north of Post Street should be encouraged to respect the existing character of adjacent residential properties.
  4. **Blue Rock Inn/Larkwood Court.** The City encourages rehabilitation of the Blue Rock Inn that restores its historic character. Construction of a retail building on the existing parking lot along Magnolia Avenue to fill in the frontage on the street may also be considered.
  5. **Catholic Church Property.** The City encourages infill development on the parking lots on either side of Ristorante Fabrizio with mixed-use buildings, particularly including affordable housing. If redevelopment occurs, the new buildings shall create a consistent street edge on Magnolia Avenue except where a small public plaza is encouraged along Magnolia Avenue on a portion of the site of the northern parking lot.
  6. **Fendler Property.** The City encourages the construction of a mixed-use building on the Fendler property's vacant Magnolia Avenue frontage, in order to fill in the frontage along the street.
  7. **Costello Property.** If a new use is proposed for the Costello residence, the City would prefer that the site be used for a bed-and-breakfast hotel or a cultural facility. The property's house and grounds should remain intact.
  8. **Old Eubanks Property.** If the Old Eubanks Building is replaced, the City encourages the new project on the site to include a plaza serving City Hall and the southern Downtown to be located at the northwest corner of the lot.
  9. **Pacific Bell Property.** The City encourages the construction of housing at the front of the now vacant Pacific Bell property, and the construction of a publicly accessible parking lot or other facility on the rear portion of the property.
  10. **Prahm Property/Arch Street.** If new construction occurs on the Prahm property, it shall be designed to improve the visual image of the existing building on the site, and to eliminate parking in the front of the existing building. The City encourages the construction of a mixed-use project with residential units on the site.
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Figure 4 Illustrative Plan



LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN



**11. Lark Creek Shoppes.** The City encourages the retention of the unique, small-town character of the Lark Creek Shoppes and the Lark Creek Inn.

The City may develop a parking lot on the vacant Arch Street right-of-way and the lot to the south, provided that funding becomes available. If a parking lot is constructed, the Arch Street steps should be preserved and adequate access from them to Magnolia Avenue should be provided.



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## **Chapter V**

### **MARKET RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Bay Area Economics, subconsultants to Brady and Associates, prepared a market study of retail, residential and office markets in the Downtown area. The study is available as a separate report from the City of Larkspur and is summarized in the Existing Conditions Report.

Based on the market study findings, the section below presents recommendations for the retail, office, and residential sectors in Downtown Larkspur. Existing conditions within each market type also are summarized.

#### **A. Retail Market Recommendations**

##### **1. Existing Conditions**

The analysis shows the following data regarding the existing retail market in Larkspur:

- Downtown Larkspur contains approximately 100,000 square feet of retail space.
- The stores and restaurants found in Downtown Larkspur represent an interesting mixture of local-serving and region-serving facilities. Examples of local-serving retail in Downtown Larkspur, which typically serves residents and employees within a one-to-two mile radius, include the two shoe repair stores, the laundromat and cleaners, the Lucky supermarket, and Rainbow Market. Region-serving facilities, providing unique or high quality goods or services, serve a larger market area than local-serving facilities. Examples of region-serving facilities in Downtown Larkspur include the Lark Creek Inn, the Artist Proof Bookstore, and the Lark Theater.
- The current retail vacancy rate in the Downtown is approximately 10 percent, which is somewhat higher than a healthy vacancy rate. It is also higher than the vacancy rate found at competing shopping centers within the Market Area, which includes Larkspur, Corte Madera and some unincorporated areas such as Greenbrae and Kentfield.

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- After adjusting for inflation, Larkspur as a whole has experienced relatively flat retail sales levels during the past decade, and was not a contributor to retail sales growth in the Market Area. Moreover, neither Larkspur nor the County (with the exception of The Village and Town Center developments) kept pace with the growth in taxable sales in the State.
  - Two categories of retail use (food stores and restaurants), are estimated to account for over 90 percent of the sales Downtown.
  - Seventy-five percent of Downtown sales are concentrated in two particular outlets, the Lark Creek Inn and the Lucky supermarket.
  - Sales per square foot at retail outlets in the Downtown, other than the Lark Creek Inn and Lucky's, are at or below average.
  - The Market Area contains a substantial amount of retail space with a wide range of local and region-serving goods. Outside of Downtown Larkspur, both grocery and restaurants are well-represented, providing competition even to Downtown Larkspur's most well-established retail facilities.
  - In all store categories except food, packaged liquor and building materials, the Market Area shows higher-than-expected sales based on the current population base and income levels.

## **2. Conclusions**

Based on the analysis as summarized in the Existing Conditions above, the following conclusions have been made:

- Substantial additional amounts of retail space will likely not be supported by market demand in Downtown Larkspur, due to the abundance of nearby competitive supply as well as the lack of expected population growth in the Market Area. Additional region-serving space in the Downtown will also have difficulty competing effectively with nearby shopping centers due to the lack of freeway access and visibility.
  - The only store category with clear unmet demand in the Market Area is building materials, indicating potential for a small hardware store in the Downtown area. However, there are currently two hardware stores within one mile of the Downtown, representing substantial competition. Furthermore, the retail building materials/hardware industry is shifting away from small stores toward large region-serving facilities such as Home Depot.
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### 3. Recommendations

Since substantial amounts of new retail development would likely not be supported by market demand, the Downtown should seek to reinforce its current strengths through a specialized, targeted tenant mix and related strategies. The existing presence of large amounts of region-serving retail in the Market Area means that a large number of shoppers view the area as a shopping destination. The Downtown can follow one or more of the strategies listed below to maximize this regional character. These recommendations are not mutually exclusive, and can be implemented in conjunction with each other.

a. Food Orientation. The presence of Lark Creek Inn and other restaurants demonstrates that the synergy created by a high-quality product or service can make region-serving retail succeed in a location like the Downtown's. It is recommended that the Downtown build incrementally on its strength and market itself as a food-oriented destination by:

- Targeting specific food-related tenants for vacant or underutilized ground floor retail space such, as purveyors of fresh produce, high-quality coffee and teas, breads/baked goods, fresh pasta, candy, and/or desserts (frozen yogurt, ice cream, etc.). Recommended locations for food-oriented retail space are in the Rainbow Market building, the ground floor of the Nazari property, and the other vacant or underutilized spaces in the northern portion of the Downtown.
- Creating merchandising and physical design strategies that promote a food theme. Examples of these strategies include food-oriented special events (e.g., a Taste of Larkspur), cooperative advertising campaigns, gateway signs with a food motif, and a public relations campaign with restaurant reviews appearing in local newspapers. The merchandising strategies should be implemented by either the Larkspur Community Association and/or a newly-created downtown merchants group.

b. Specialty Boutiques. The large number of relatively affluent seniors in the Market Area suggests that certain stores in Downtown Larkspur could be targeted to these potential shoppers. Therefore, it is recommended that vacant or underutilized ground floor retail space be targeted to specialty stores offering high-quality goods and services for seniors. Stores in this category include gourmet foods (which are already described above), gift shops, specialty furniture/antiques, decorating services, high-quality toys and baby supplies (for grandchildren and friends), travel services, eye care outlets, cosmetics stores and photographic developing and equipment.

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c. Entertainment and Visitor Destination. Downtown Larkspur already has the beginnings of an entertainment base due to the presence of the Lark Theater and the Jessup Orange Works Cabaret. In addition, the Lark Creek Inn draws evening diners from throughout the Bay Area and beyond.

It is recommended that the Downtown pursue a marketing strategy that builds upon this emerging entertainment/cultural character by filling vacant or underutilized space with facilities such as galleries or theaters. To attract more visitors, Downtown development should include a visitor-serving facility such as a small hotel or bed-and-breakfast.

Given current and expected future market conditions, any significant expansion of retail space in the Plan Area should be subject to a thorough market feasibility study for the proposed store type to determine its viability and impact on the existing retail base.

## **B. Office Market Recommendations**

### **1. Existing Conditions**

The analysis shows the following data regarding the existing office market in Larkspur:

- Currently, Downtown Larkspur has just over 33,000 square feet of office space.
- Downtown office spaces have a reported vacancy rate of 3.2 percent, which is within the same vacancy range as major office projects in the Market Area.
- Although the depth of the market's ability to absorb all the recently constructed space is unknown, there appears to be a fairly healthy demand for smaller office space in the area.
- Downtown Larkspur has lower rents as compared to surrounding office areas, making unlikely any large-scale movement of the existing tenants to other space.

### **2. Recommendations**

Based on the low office vacancy rate in Downtown Larkspur, the occupational mix of Larkspur's residents, and the increased County employment growth projected for office-based employment sectors over the next decade, office

development should be pursued in Downtown Larkspur. Office space should probably be in the form of small offices catering to professional and business services. Offices above existing or new retail spaces would be particularly well suited to the Downtown Larkspur environment.

Additional offices in the Downtown Larkspur area would also have the positive effect of adding a limited number of customers to the retail portion of Downtown's economic base. This added support might provide additional economic incentive for development or redevelopment of infill sites which currently form gaps in the ground floor retail strip. Small office space above retail uses thus offers an opportunity to bolster economic performance in the Downtown area.

### **C. Residential Market Recommendations**

#### **1. Existing Conditions**

The analysis shows the following data regarding the existing residential market in Larkspur:

- In Larkspur, rental units make up 49% of all residential units in the city.
- There are currently an estimated 7 single-family and 81 multi-family rental residential units located in Downtown Larkspur.
- Downtown rental units have a healthy vacancy rate of four percent.
- The median rent for units in Downtown Larkspur falls at the low end of the newer rental units in the Market Area on a per square foot basis.
- The recently completed Larkspur Courts project has shown a high absorption rate, indicating continuing market acceptance for rental units in the area.
- The marketability of for-sale condominiums in a Downtown setting in the Market Area is unknown due to a lack of comparable product. Overall indicators are that the condominiums in the Market Area and Marin County are continuing to sell even in the current economic downturn.

#### **2. Recommendations**

The Downtown's low vacancy rate indicates that the area could support at least 10 to 20 new market-rate condominiums or apartments. Since new

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owner-occupied, e.g. condominium housing is an untested product type within the Market Area, a full market feasibility study is recommended before any such project is constructed.

It is also recommended that, to improve marketability, new residential development be located near the southern end of Downtown, which has a more residential setting and large trees. If residential projects are constructed in the central and northern portions of the Downtown, they should be located above ground floor retail space in order to maintain the retail character of the area. Most projects should probably include 10 to 20 units to maximize marketing opportunities.

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## Chapter VI

### LAND USE ELEMENT



This chapter of the Specific Plan translates the vision and goals expressed in Chapter III into land use designations and policies for the Downtown. These designations and policies are intended to define the physical parameters of development in the Downtown over the next 20 years.

#### A. Existing Downtown Land Use Configuration

Land use planning for the downtown, and the design and parking requirements that flow from it, are based on the existing conditions in Downtown Larkspur. The *Existing Conditions Report* shows that the Downtown can be divided into three areas:

- The traditional, storefront-oriented Downtown to the north of King Street, in which shops face Magnolia at ground level, and some buildings have office or residential uses above them. In this Specific Plan, this area is called the "Storefront Downtown."
- A more dispersed Downtown area to the south of King Street, in which building densities are lower, there is more vegetation around buildings, some non-retail uses face the street, and buildings are occasionally set back from the street with parking or landscaping in front of them. In this Specific Plan, this area is called the "Garden Downtown."
- An area at the north of the Downtown, including Larkspur Plaza and the Mt. Tam Racquet Club, that is developed with large, modern buildings that are not consistent with the traditional style of building in the Downtown. This area is called the "Transitional Downtown" in this Specific Plan.

The Storefront and Garden districts of the Downtown are connected by the Civic Core, which is made up of City Hall, the fire station, and St. Patrick's Church. The Transitional Downtown is buffered from the Storefront Downtown by plantings along Magnolia Avenue, and by Doherty Drive.

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Within the designated Downtown study area, there is also one parcel that is currently designated for High Density Residential Use. This designation is maintained on this parcel under this Specific Plan.

## **B. Land Use Categories and Regulations**

The Land Use Plan for the Downtown, which is shown in Figure 5, includes four separate land use categories. The intent, distribution and specific land use regulations of these land use categories are described below. Additional design and parking policies for these land use categories are found in Chapters VI and VII of this report.

In this section, actual land use policies are shown in **bold type**. Text in regular type gives background regarding the policies.

### **1. Storefront Downtown**

This designation is intended to continue and enhance the intensive mixed use of the Downtown area that is typically found between Ward and King Streets along Magnolia Avenue. This area is typified by one- and two-story buildings that come to the street, without front or side setbacks. The Storefront Downtown area encompasses most of the northern section of the downtown above King Street, and also includes the Nazari property. Any development or expansion on these properties will be required to follow the regulations of the Storefront Downtown land use category.

**Permitted Uses: Retail, restaurant, office, multi-family residential and hotel/inn uses. New single-family residences are not allowed. Ground floor spaces facing Magnolia Avenue generally should have retail uses or uses that generate high amounts of foot traffic, and do not create hazards, nuisances or odors.**

This section is intended to respond to landowner requests that there be minimal restrictions on land use in the Downtown. The restriction on ground-floor uses is critical to create and maintain high volumes of pedestrian traffic and activity at street level in the Storefront Downtown area.

**Conditional Uses: Uses that may create hazards, nuisances or odors, including entertainment uses, shall require a conditional use permit.**

Figure 5 Land Use Designations



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**Building Height:** Two stories or 25 feet, or taller if deemed appropriate by the Planning Commission under the following qualifications:

- The height of the proposed building will be consistent with the pattern of development in the neighborhood;
- The height exception will result in a building that is either functionally or aesthetically superior to what would have been allowed without the exception;
- The exception will not result in a building with a floor area that is significantly larger than would have been achieved without the exception; and
- The proposed exception will not be detrimental to the health, safety, morals, comfort, convenience, or general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of the structure in question, nor be injurious to property or improvements in the neighborhood. The basis for this finding shall include but not be limited to the fact that the proposed building does not block the significant views from the adjoining properties, nor does it significantly impair the access of the adjoining properties to light, air, or insolation nor significantly impair the privacy of adjoining residential properties.

This restriction is the same as that currently in place in the Downtown.

**Maximum Floor Area Ratio<sup>1</sup>:** .80. Properties currently exceeding the maximum FAR shall not be considered nonconforming. Alteration or reconstruction of such buildings necessitated by damage or destruction to match their original size will be permitted provided that the gross square footage of the original building(s) is not exceeded, that documentation of the square footage of the structure(s) immediately preceding the destruction can be provided, and that the new construction meets all zoning code provisions.

Previously, the City's General Plan allowed a FAR of 1.00 in the Downtown. The General Plan's intent was to allow for development in the Downtown that would be consistent with the density of development already existing in the area. However, studies for this Specific Plan indicate that the existing FAR on most blocks of the Storefront Downtown area is between .60 and .80, so the allowable FAR has been lowered from 1.00 to .80. The General Plan has been amended to reflect this change.

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<sup>1</sup> A Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is the ratio of the total square footage of building on a site to the total parcel size. For example, a two-story building with floors of 1,000 square feet each, built on a 4,000 square foot lot, has an FAR of .50.

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**Yard Requirements:**

**Front Yard:** None required. Mandatory zero front setback along Magnolia Avenue and Ward Street, with exceptions for public open space designated under the Specific Plan.

**Side Yards:** None required. Maximum side setback of 4 feet where buildings face Magnolia Avenue. Rear portions at least 20 feet behind the Magnolia Avenue property line may have wider side setbacks for light and ventilation.

**Rear Yards:** None required, unless lot abuts a lot in a residential zoned district, where minimum rear yard is 10 feet.

Zero setback lines along Magnolia Avenue and minimal side yard setbacks are critical to maintain the intimate scale of the Downtown.

**Design and Heritage Preservation Board Review.** Required for all new construction that modifies the exterior of a building.

**2. Garden Downtown**

This designation is intended to continue and enhance the non-intensive mixed use of Downtown areas that are south of King Street along Magnolia Avenue. These areas are typified by a mixture of low density residential and commercial uses, and by a large amount of greenery. The intensity of use along Magnolia Avenue that exists north of King Street is not present in this area.

**Permitted Uses:** Retail, restaurant, office, multi-family residential and hotel/inn uses.

This section is intended to respond to landowner requests that there be no unnecessary restrictions on land use in the Downtown.

**Conditional Uses:** Uses that may create hazards, nuisances or odors, including entertainment uses, shall require a conditional use permit.

**Building Height Limit:** Two stories or 25 feet, whichever is less.

This restriction is the same as that currently in place in the Downtown. No exceptions are allowed in this district as a means of maintaining the low scale of buildings in the area.

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**Maximum Floor Area Ratio:** .20 as of right, .50 with a conditional use permit. Conditions for an FAR in excess of .20 include provision of adequate parking on site and other mitigating features such as exceptional architectural detailing, public amenities or affordable housing. Properties currently exceeding the maximum FAR shall not be considered nonconforming. Alteration or reconstruction of such buildings necessitated by damage or destruction to match their original size will be permitted provided that the gross square footage of the original building(s) is not exceeded, that documentation of the square footage of the structure(s) immediately preceding the destruction can be provided, and that the new construction meets all zoning code provisions.

This FAR of right, which is lower than that found in the Storefront Downtown, reflects the actual density of buildings that currently exist in the Garden Downtown area, such as the Lark Creek Shoppes and the Costello residence. It will accommodate all projects that are foreseen under the Specific Plan, while maintaining the heavily landscaped character of the area.

**Yard Requirements:**

**Front Yard:** None required. Any front yard setback along Magnolia must be landscaped, and may not be used for parking.

**Side Yards:** None required.

**Rear Yards:** Not less than 10 feet, with a minimum of 20 feet on a lot that abuts a lot in a residential-zoned district.

These restrictions are similar to those found in the City's AP (Administrative and Professional) zoning district. Parking is not allowed in front yards in order to ensure that the Magnolia Avenue frontage is maintained as a visually attractive corridor.

**Design and Heritage Preservation Board Review.** Required for all new construction that modifies the exterior of a building.

### **3. Transitional Downtown**

This designation is intended to continue and enhance the more modern commercial uses of the northern part of the Downtown, including Larkspur

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Plaza and the Mount Tam Racquet Club.<sup>2</sup> These areas are typified by single use commercial and recreational buildings with relatively low building coverage and large amounts of surface parking.

**Permitted Uses: Retail, restaurant, office, recreational, multi-family residential and hotel/inn uses.**

This section is intended to respond to landowner requests that there be no unnecessary restrictions on land use in the Downtown.

**Conditional Uses: Uses that may create hazards, nuisances or odors, including entertainment uses, shall require a conditional use permit.**

**Building Height Limit: Two stories or 25 feet, whichever is less.**

This restriction is the same as that currently in place in the Downtown. No exceptions are allowed in this district as a means of maintaining the low scale of buildings in the area.

**Maximum Floor Area Ratio: .30 as of right, .40 with a conditional use permit. Conditions for a FAR above .30 include provision of adequate parking on site and other mitigating features such as exceptional architectural detailing, public amenities or affordable housing. Properties currently exceeding the maximum FAR shall not be considered nonconforming. Alteration or reconstruction of such buildings necessitated by damage or destruction to match their original size will be permitted provided that the gross square footage of the original building(s) is not exceeded, that documentation of the square footage of the structure(s) immediately preceding the destruction can be provided, and that the new construction meets all zoning code provisions.**

This FAR, which is lower than that found in the Storefront Downtown, reflects the actual density of buildings that currently exist in the Transitional Downtown area. It will accommodate all projects that are foreseen under the Specific Plan, while maintaining the heavily landscaped and dispersed character of the area.

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<sup>2</sup>Although the Mount Tam Racquet Club, north of Doherty Drive, was not included in the study area for this Specific Plan, it is included in the City's General Plan "Downtown" land use designation. For this reason, this property has been given a designation in this Specific Plan.

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**Yard Requirements:**

**Front Yard:** Not less than 20 feet. Front yard setback must include at least 8 feet of landscaping at the property line. The remainder of the setback may be used for parking.

**Side Yards:** Not less than 6 feet. Not less than 10 feet for a two story building on a lot that abuts a lot in a residential-zoned district.

**Rear Yards:** Not less than 10 feet, with a minimum of 20 feet on a lot that abuts a lot in a residential-zoned district.

These restrictions are similar to those found in the City's AP (Administrative and Professional) zoning district.

**Design Review.** Required for all new construction that modifies the exterior of a building.

**4. High Density Residential**

This designation is intended to allow for high density, multi-family residential development. In the Downtown, it occurs only on the site of the parsonage of St. Patrick's Church on King Street. This building is already designated for High Density Residential use by the City's General Plan and zoning code, and the existing residential use should be retained.

The High Density Residential land use designation in this Specific Plan is identical to the High Density Residential designation in the City's General Plan, and includes the following regulations:

**Permitted Uses:** Single and multi-family residences, public parks and playgrounds, churches and schools.

**Conditional Uses:** Community clubhouses, childcare, public utilities, businesses incidental to an apartment house, bed-and-breakfast inns and other uses found to be consistent with the high-density residential zone may be allowed if a conditional use permit is granted by the Planning Commission.

**Building Height Limit:** 35 feet.

**Maximum Floor Area Ratio:** .60, but lower for properties with a slope greater than 10 percent.

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**Yard Requirements:**

**Front Yard: Not less than 15 feet.**

**Side Yards: Not less than 6 feet. Not less than 10 feet on a corner.**

**Rear Yards: Not less than 15 feet.**

**Design and Heritage Preservation Board Review. Design Review Board approval is required for construction that modifies the exterior of a commercial building or multi-family residence. Heritage Preservation Board review is required for construction that modifies the exterior of a building in the Combining Heritage Preservation District.**

**C. Land Use Projections**

Because the land use designations for the Downtown area allow for a mixture of uses, it is difficult to project what land uses will occur in the Downtown under ultimate Specific Plan buildout. Table 3 shows land use projections for the area based on the Illustrative Plan in Chapter III. These projections have been prepared for the purposes of evaluating future parking demand and other impacts associated with the Specific Plan, and are not an ultimate limit or constraint on development. Additional development may occur under the Specific Plan, provided that it supplies adequate parking and receives appropriate City approvals.

Table 3 includes two specific components:

- Increases in use associated with specific projects shown in the Illustrative Plan.
- Increases in use in the Storefront Downtown where buildings currently have a floor area ratio of less than .80. These buildings will be allowed to expand under the Specific Plan up to FAR = .80 as of right, with appropriate design review.

Any projects that do not fall into one of these two categories have not been included in the land use projections, and are therefore not included in the parking calculations, environmental assessment, or other evaluations made in support of this plan. Additional projects are not excluded from consideration under the Specific Plan, but must be reviewed carefully by the City before approval.

**Table 3**  
**Projected Specific Plan Land Use<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Retail (sq.ft.)</b>	<b>Restaurant (sq.ft.)</b>	<b>Office (sq.ft.)</b>	<b>Residence (units)</b>
Existing	85,600	18,200	41,400	88
Illustrative	25,200	---	37,400	17
Increased FAR	7,300	---	14,600	---
Total Increase	32,500	---	52,000	17
Projected Total	118,100	18,200	93,400	105

<sup>a</sup> All entries are rounded to the nearest 100 square feet.



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## **Chapter VII**

### **URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT**



This element of the Specific Plan sets forth design concepts and guidelines for the Downtown area. All renovation and new development in the area will be evaluated in relation to these guidelines, which are intended to allow flexibility and innovative building design, while also maintaining the continuity of the intimately-scaled, historic downtown. These guidelines are intended as guides only, and are strictly advisory and not binding.

This element consists of the following components:

- A list of design concepts to guide development in the Downtown.
- An outline of City landscape and public space improvements that are to be carried out under the plan.
- Design guidelines that apply to all properties in the Downtown area.
- Site specific design possibilities that apply to specific parcels in the Downtown.

#### **A. Design Concepts**

This section provides an overview of the design concepts that are to be followed in the Downtown. While the design concepts are not specific in nature, they are intended to indicate the overall intention and direction that is to be followed in Downtown design, and they should guide any development proposals created for the area.

The guiding design concepts for the Downtown are:

1. To provide a distinct, cohesive image for the Downtown.
2. To maintain and enhance the intimate human scale and existing historical urban fabric.
3. To provide public gathering spaces at plazas and in natural areas.
4. To provide for landscaping in the Downtown that reinforces Larkspur's strong connection to the natural landscape.

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## B. Landscape Improvements

As a part of the Specific Plan, the City may complete a set of public landscape improvements that create a more unified streetscape in the Downtown. Individual components of the landscape program are described below, and are illustrated in Figure 6. Completion of the improvements is contingent on funds becoming available, as described in Chapter IX

- **Street Trees.** The City would install uniform street trees along Magnolia Avenue to create a unified landscape theme in the Downtown. Trees should be of medium size, and spaced closely together, at approximately 20 to 30 feet on center. Trees would be similar in scale to those already planted in some areas of the downtown, and would be of a single species such as ficus, tallow or alder.

This program would require cutting new tree wells into the existing sidewalks. There is currently some question as to whether trees can be accommodated on the west side of the street, where there may be a large mechanical chase located. However, it should be possible to plant some trees, regardless of the amount of infrastructure under the sidewalk.

- **Landmark Landscaping.** At special nodes along Magnolia Avenue, the City will encourage private developers to plant individual landmark trees or other distinctive landscaping. Selected landscaping should include trees that will reach a significant stature and shape, such as stone pines or ginkgos, or small groupings of colorful or distinctive trees such as pistache, tallow, liquidambar or plums, to provide a visual accent in the area. Locations for landmark landscaping are indicated on Figure 6.
- **Public Plazas.** Public open space in the Downtown should be expanded with the addition of four plazas: at Ward and Magnolia; around the existing railroad buildings; on the Catholic Church property north of Ristorante Fabrizio; and south of City Hall on the site of the old Eubanks building.
- **Northern Gateway.** The *Existing Conditions Report* identifies a need for a northern gateway to the Downtown between Doherty Drive and Post Street, which would mark the entrance to the area for motorists coming from the north. The gateway should consist of dense plantings of landmark trees such as redwoods on several sites, including the triangular, City-owned parcel adjacent to Larkspur Plaza, the north side of the Nazari property, and the southern edge of the Post Street parking lot, along the blank wall of the Lark Theater. A monumental sign marking the entry to Downtown and a grove of trees should also be

Figure 6 Landscape Plan



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DOWNTOWN  
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installed in the median on Magnolia Avenue. The trees in the median should complement the landmark trees in the triangular parcel; deciduous colorful species such as liriodendron or liquidambar would be suitable. The street should be repaved with a concrete, brick and asphalt pattern to match the style of the new sidewalks installed as part of the Magnolia Avenue repaving.

- **Southern Gateway.** The southern gateway to the Downtown is already strongly defined with redwood trees, and should be strengthened through the addition of ornamental paving between Madrone and William Avenue.
- **Bicycle Path.** The existing bicycle path in the abandoned Northwest Pacific Railroad right-of-way should be improved to run through a landscaped corridor. The corridor should be similar to the one south of Cane Street, with trees such as alder and willow. The bike path should also be realigned in the triangular parcel next to Larkspur Plaza to create a more direct connection to the intersection with Doherty Drive.
- **Stairs and crosswalks on Arch and Post Streets.** As part of development projects in these paper street rights-of-way, the City should improve the existing stairs to Walnut and Locust Avenues, and install ornamental handrails. Gateways would mark the two ends of each stair at Magnolia, Walnut and Locust. The gateways and handrails would be historic in character. New brick and concrete crosswalks across Magnolia Avenue to match the recently installed sidewalks should also be installed where the stairs connect to Magnolia.
- **Street Furniture.** The City should design and implement a coordinated program of benches, trash cans, news racks, bike racks and water fountains along Magnolia Avenue. The street furniture selected should be compatible with the historical theme of the downtown, and the period of Downtown construction around 1910. However, street furniture need not be reproductions of historical items, and might have some modern design details such as smooth lines and limited ornamentation.

### C. Area-wide Design Guidelines

This section contains design guidelines for all parcels in the Downtown's Storefront and Garden Downtown districts. For ease of reference, the guidelines are broken down according to the two districts, and are repeated where they are the same in both districts.

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The City's existing design guidelines, which are found in Chapter 18.64 of the Zoning Code, are the only general guidelines that apply in the Transitional Downtown. Section 18.64 will also continue to apply in the Storefront and Garden Downtown districts, to the extent that the guidelines in that section are consistent with the design guidelines in this Specific Plan. Where there are conflicts between the two sets of guidelines, this Specific Plan will prevail.

Historic structures in the Downtown listed on the City's Historic Resources Inventory are also subject to the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines administered by the Heritage Preservation Board.

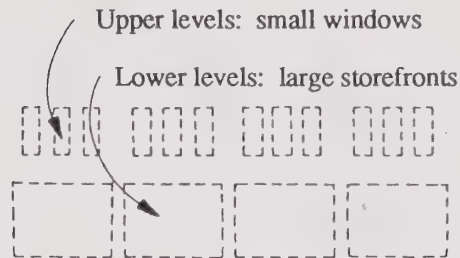
## **1. Storefront Downtown**

a. Existing Conditions. Buildings in the Storefront Downtown generally have the following organization:

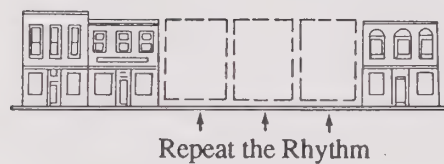
- Buildings generally accommodate mixed uses, with retail use on the ground floor and offices or residences on any upper floors.
- There is generally a clear distinction between ground floor retail and upper residential/office spaces. A continuous lintel or a change in window pattern separates these two areas.
- Facades are organized into a series of bays, which have a regular cadence on the upper floors, and an irregular cadence on the lower floors. The irregularity on the ground floor marks the entry to the upper floors.
- The ground floor is basically transparent, with a large amount of window space.
- Upper floors consist of solid walls with individual windows cut into them.
- Windows on both floors have a vertical orientation, and there are often bays to further emphasize this vertical orientation.
- The ground-floor retail facades share several elements, including a low bulkhead wall, plate glass windows, a space for signage and a transom window above this space.
- Each building includes a large amount of street level interest, including awnings, ornaments, recessed entries, and well-scaled signs.
- Each building is capped with a parapet or cornice at its top.

b. Guidelines

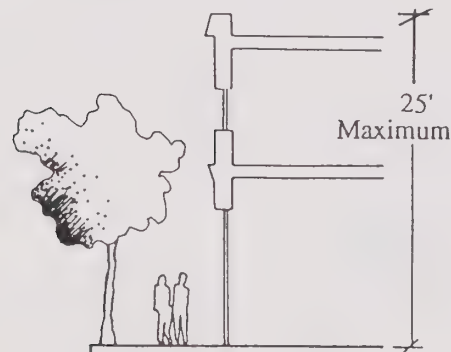
Based on the existing conditions, the following design guidelines should be followed for all new construction and building renovations in the Storefront Downtown:



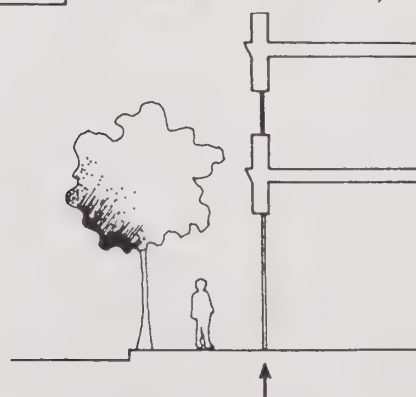
(1) Where buildings front on Magnolia Avenue, the ground floor of each building should have visually permeable shop frontages with large windows. Upper floors should have smaller window openings punched into solid walls.



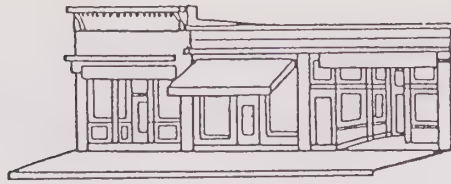
(2) Buildings should follow the pattern of bays found in the neighborhood. Large buildings should be articulated as several bays.



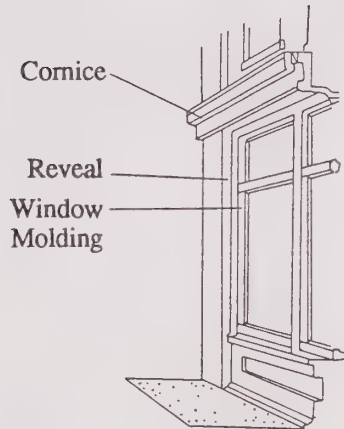
(3) Buildings should be one or two stories tall, with a maximum height of 25 feet.



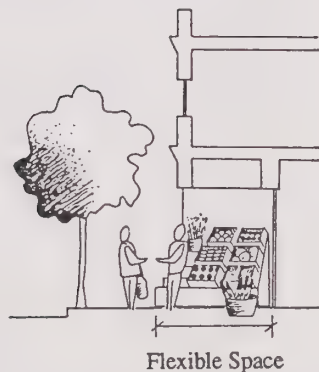
(4) Where buildings front on Magnolia Avenue, they should be built to the lot line and the sidewalk, without intervening vegetation or parking, except on specific sites where public plazas are foreseen in the Specific Plan.



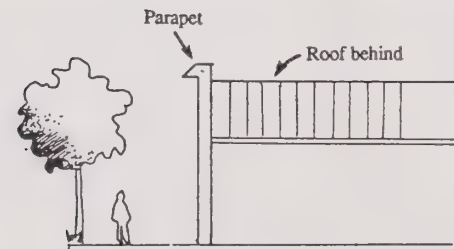
(5) Ground floor facades should include pedestrian-scaled detailing including vertical windows and overhanging awnings.



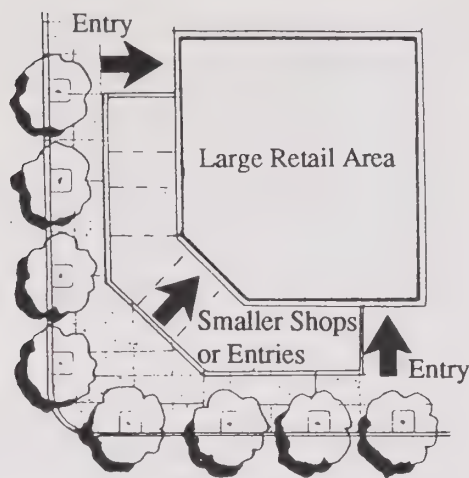
(6) Unless a building is designed to reflect a certain historic period during which detailing was minimized, all facades should include three-dimensional detailing, such as cornices, window moldings and reveals to cast shadows and create visual interest on the facade.



(7) Facades should include indentations for entries, product display and/or seating. In some locations, retail and cafe uses can also spill out onto the sidewalk.



(8) In most cases, buildings should have parapets that create the visual effect of a "flat roof" along Magnolia Avenue, and roof lines should be detailed or adorned for visual interest. Peaked or unusual roof shapes are appropriate on buildings that play a particularly prominent role in the area. Flat, overhanging roofs are not appropriate.



(9) If large commercial spaces are required at the ground floor, they should be set back from the street so they can be lined with shallow, smaller retail spaces or similar uses along the street. The presence of these large spaces on the street should be consistent with existing small shops.

(10) Building facades should generally be constructed of materials already used in the area, such as horizontal tongue-and-groove wood siding, painted wood shingles, high-quality stucco and red brick. The following types of materials are not appropriate:

- Highly finished materials such as polished metal and reflective glass, except as accents.
- Manmade materials intended to mimic natural materials, such as composition wood paneling or shingles.
- Extremely rustic materials such as unfinished wood.

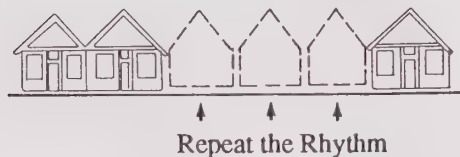
(11) Building colors in the Downtown can be relatively bright, and may include earth tones and pastels.

(12) Parking and service areas should be accommodated away from Magnolia Avenue, either behind buildings or below grade.

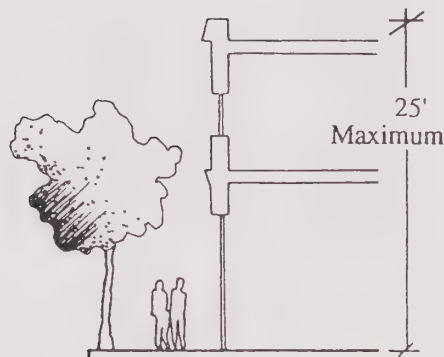
## 2. Garden Downtown

a. Existing Conditions. Buildings in the Garden Downtown have a much less consistent design image than those in the Storefront Downtown. This area is characterized by a mixture of building styles, with the historic, wood-clad structures of the Lark Creek Shoppes creating the most identifiable image. The area has a much stronger connection to nature than the Storefront Downtown, with on-site landscaping and some use of rustic materials, particularly in the signs and lampposts at the Lark Creek Shoppes.

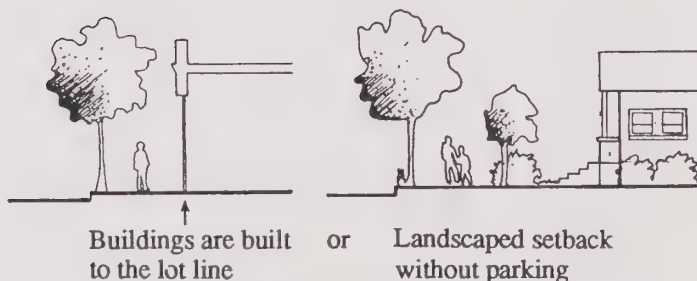
b. Guidelines. Given the mix that already exists in the area, the design guidelines for the Garden Downtown are more flexible than those of the Storefront Downtown:



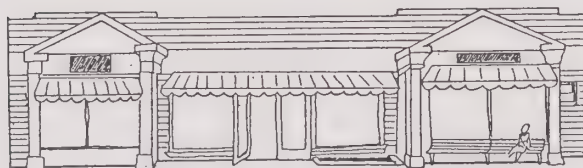
(1) Buildings should follow the pattern of small buildings found in the neighborhood. Large buildings should be articulated as several bays.



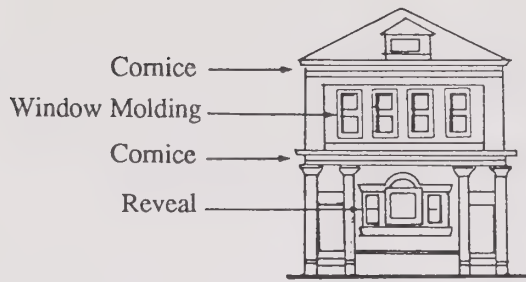
(2) Buildings should be one or two stories tall, with a maximum height of 25 feet.



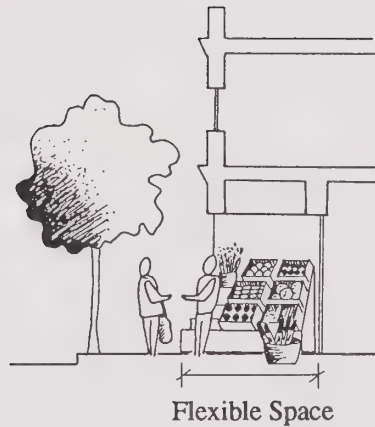
(3) Buildings should be built to the lot line and the sidewalk, or they should have landscaped front yards with vegetation or plaza space.



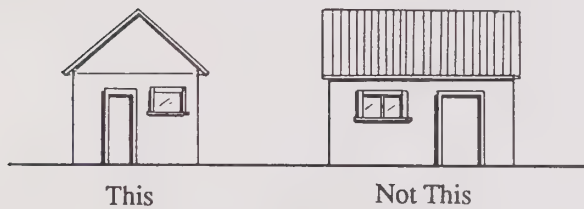
(4) Ground level facades should include pedestrian-scaled detailing including vertical windows and overhanging awnings.



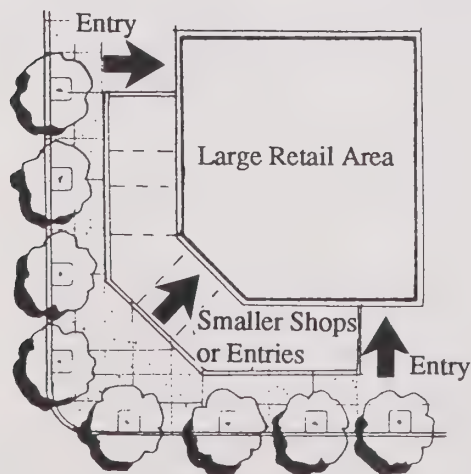
(5) Unless a building is designed to reflect a certain historic period during which detailing was minimized, all facades should include three-dimensional detailing, such as cornices, window moldings and reveals to cast shadows and create visual interest on the facade.



(6) Facades should include indentations for entries, product display and/or seating. In some places, retail and cafe uses can also spill out onto the sidewalk.



(7) Buildings may have parapets that create the visual effect of a "flat roof" along Magnolia Avenue, and roof lines should be detailed or adorned for visual interest. Gabled roofs with their peaks facing Magnolia Avenue are also acceptable.



(8) If large commercial spaces are required at the ground floor, they should be set back from the street so they can be lined with shallow, smaller retail spaces or similar uses along the street. The presence of these large spaces on the street should be consistent with existing small shops.

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(9) Building facades should generally be constructed of materials already used in the area, such as horizontal tongue-and-groove wood siding, painted wood shingles, high-quality stucco and red brick. Rustic materials such as unfinished wood may be used on buildings that are appropriately landscaped and set back from the street in a "garden" atmosphere. The following types of materials are not appropriate:

- Highly finished materials such as polished metal and reflective glass, except as accents.
- Manmade materials intended to mimic natural materials, such as composition wood paneling or shingles.

(10) Building colors in the Downtown can be relatively bright, and may include earth tones and pastels. Simple primary colors should be avoided, except as accents.

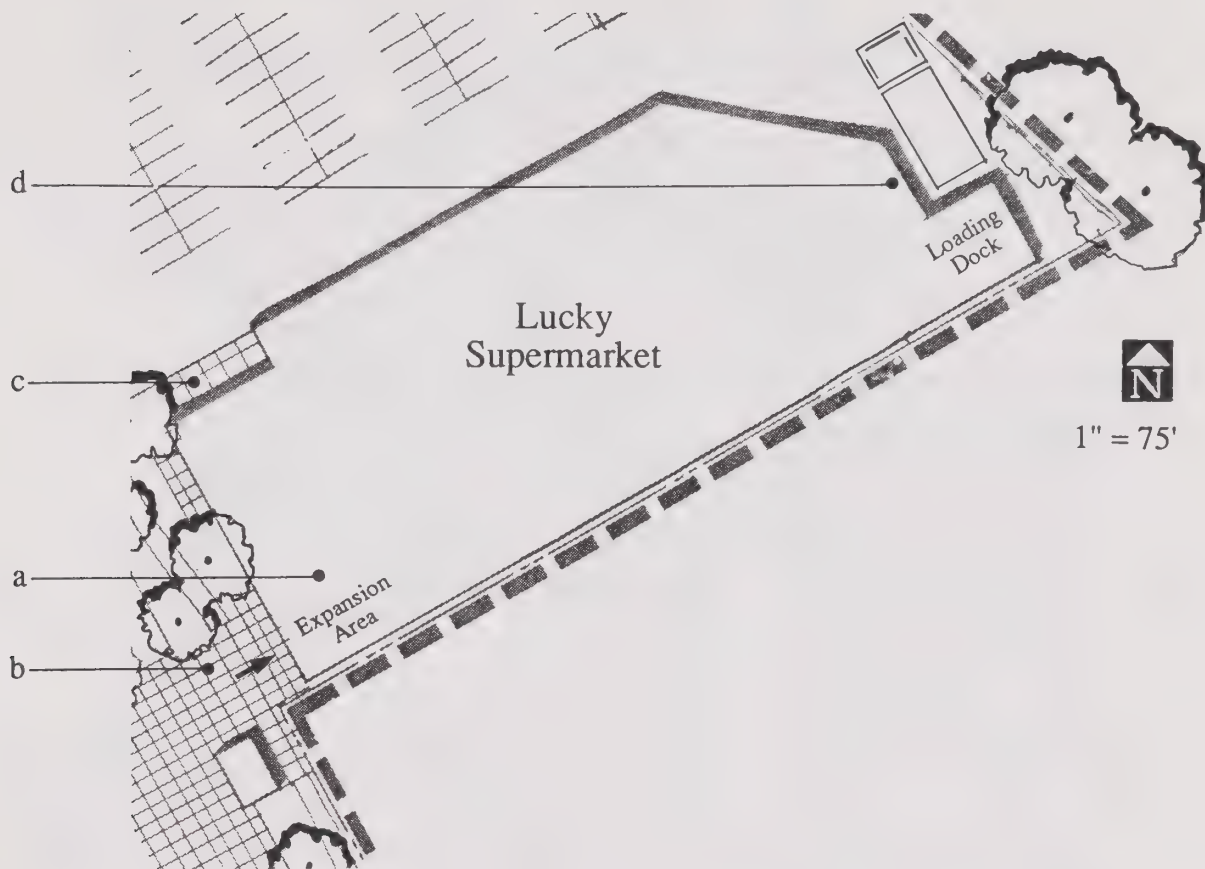
(11) Parking and service areas should be accommodated away from Magnolia Avenue, either behind buildings or below grade.

### **3. Transitional Downtown**

The City's existing design guidelines, which are found in Chapter 18.64 of the Zoning Code, are the only general guidelines that apply in the Transitional Downtown. Site specific guidelines for the proposed Lucky Supermarket expansion are contained in Section VI.D.1, below.

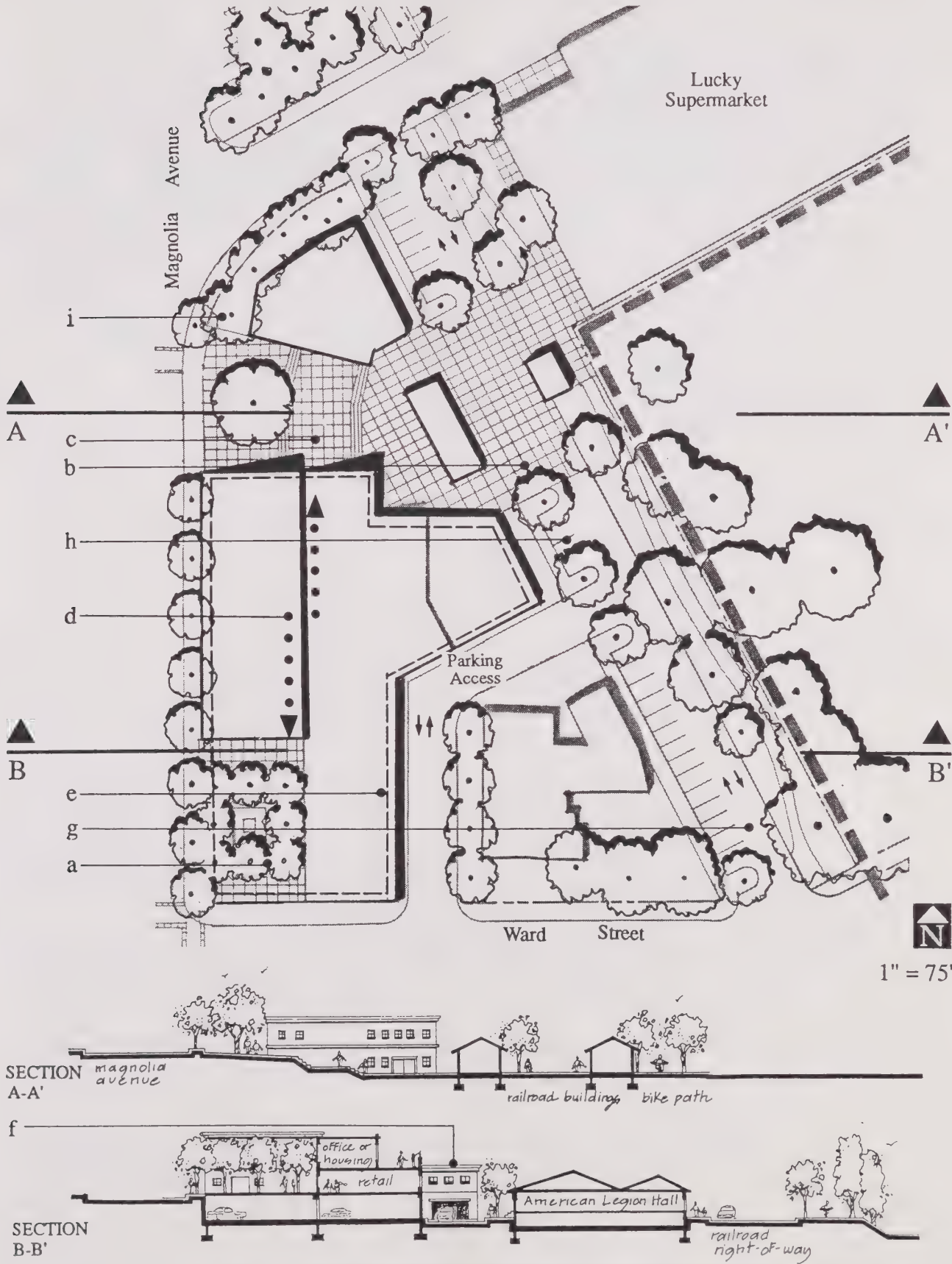
#### **D. Site Specific Design Possibilities**

This section shows design possibilities for specific sites within the Downtown. The text and drawings in this section are intended only as illustrations and to spur the creativity of designers and landowners on key sites in Downtown Larkspur. This section is strictly advisory and is not binding in any way.

**1. Lucky Expansion**

The following possibilities could be explored in the expansion of the Lucky Supermarket in Larkspur Plaza:

- a. The expansion could extend almost to the western edge of the Larkspur Plaza property, so that it connects to and creates an edge for the plaza around the railroad buildings on the Nazari property.
- b. At least one building entry could be located on the western side of the building expansion. This entry could be to the Lucky store itself, or to a separate lease space inside the building envelope.
- c. Paving from the railroad building plaza could extend from the plaza around the Lucky store to the store's main entry on the north side of the building.
- d. The store's loading dock could be relocated to the eastern end of the building. This would probably require changes to the northeast building corner to allow for adequate turning room for trucks.

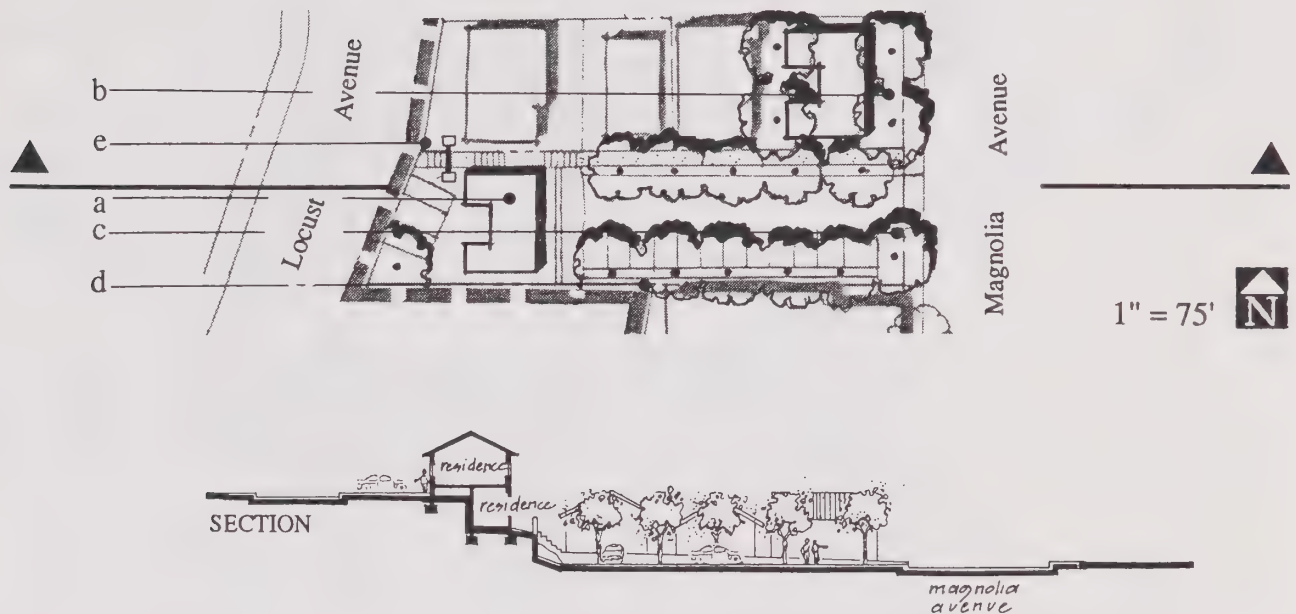


## 2. Nazari Property

The following possibilities could be explored in the development of a project on the Nazari property and the adjacent City parking lot.

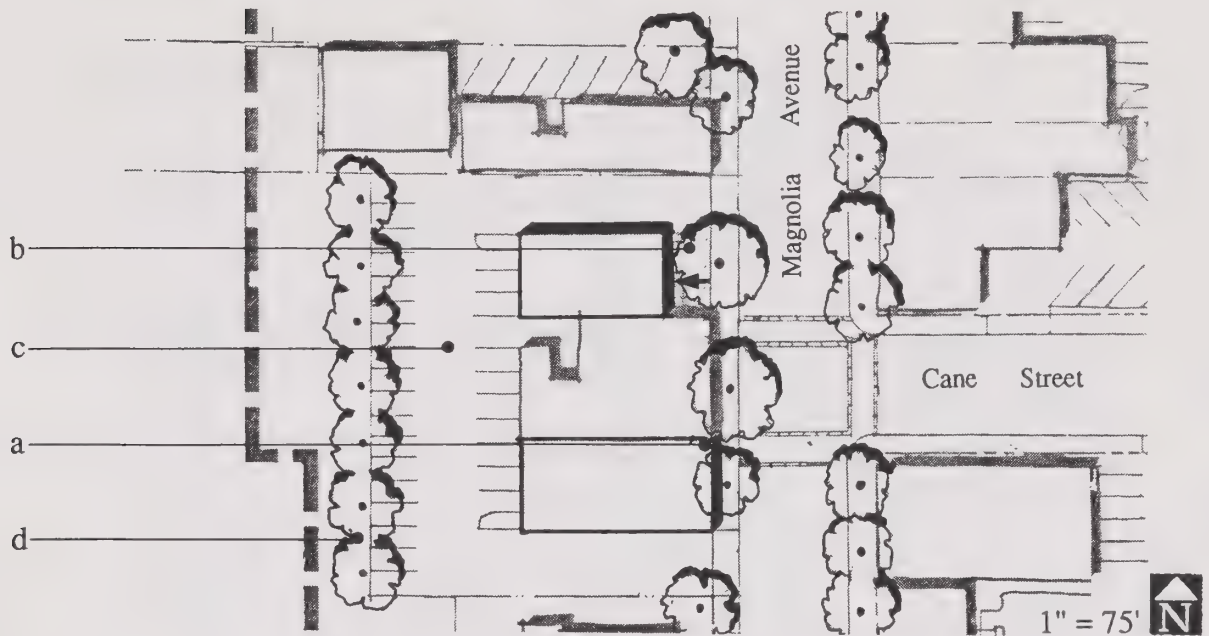
- a. The Nazari Property development could include the City parking lot, and a public plaza could be located at the corner of Ward and Magnolia. The plaza could be paved in brick or other decorative paving, and could be designed to encourage people to gather, with ample public seating, substantial landscaping, and a special visual focus such as a statue or fountain.
  - b. A second public plaza could be located around the old railroad buildings on the site. This plaza could also include public seating and landscaping. A public cafe in one of the railroad buildings could utilize the plaza for outdoor seating.
  - c. The railroad building plaza could be accessible to Magnolia Avenue through a visual and pedestrian corridor that opens towards the Lark Theater. The corridor could split the buildings on the site into two masses. Special plants such as a landmark tree, a grouping of trees, or an allée of trees could mark the entry to the plaza at Magnolia.
  - d. An internal connection through the southern building could connect the Magnolia/Ward plaza with the railroad building plaza.
  - e. Parking could be accommodated under the southern building and the Ward/Magnolia plaza. The parking structure could take advantage of the change of grade across the site, so that it would be below street level at Magnolia, but at grade near the American Legion.
  - f. The massing of the project could be made sensitive to the size of the adjacent American Legion and to solar access to the railroad plaza, by including fewer stories on the east side of the site than on the west.
  - g. The railroad right-of-way on the site could be developed with a single-loaded lane of parking and a landscaped corridor accommodating a Class I bike path.
  - h. To avoid through traffic circulation on the railroad right-of-way, traffic could access parking via two-way drives on either side of the plaza.
  - i. Large trees of a single species such as redwoods or a deciduous tree could be planted on the northern edge of the site as part of the northern gateway to the Downtown. To make the planting most effective, adequate space could be left for tree clusters, rather than for a single row of trees.
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### 3. Post Street



The following possibilities could be explored in the development of parcels north of Post Street and of a parking lot and housing on the Post Street right-of-way:

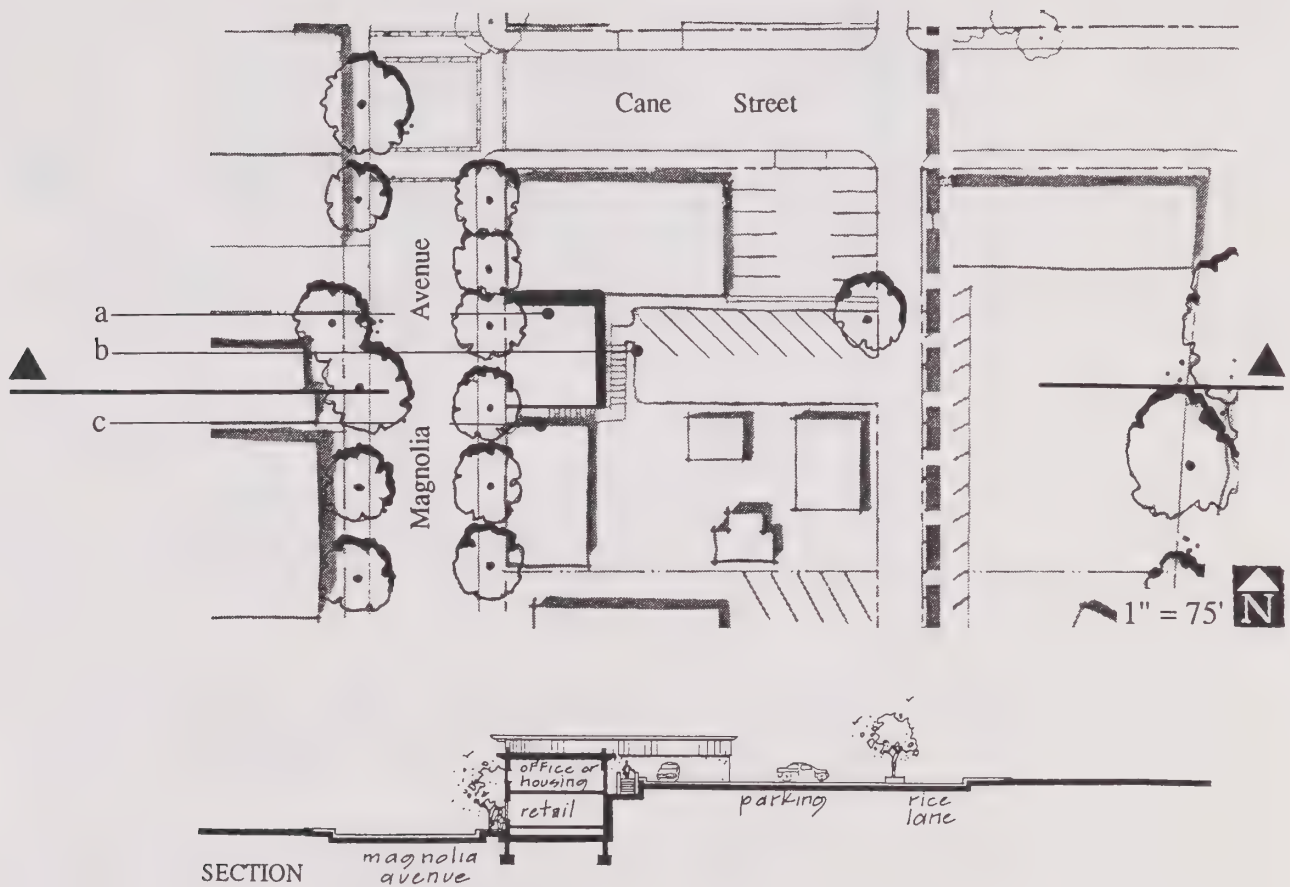
- a. The western, uphill end of Post Street could be developed with a sensitivity scaled housing project.
- b. Housing units could be constructed north of Post Street, set back from Magnolia Avenue and with adequate landscaping between them and the street.
- c. The Post Street parking lot could be buffered from Magnolia Avenue by a planting area along the street.
- d. The southern edge of the Post Street parking lot could be lined with redwoods or similar trees as part of the northern gateway treatment.
- e. The public stair in the Post Street right-of-way leading to Locust Avenue could be relocated and improved, and gateways marking the stair could be constructed at its two ends. Landscaping could screen the public walk from the housing units to the north.

**4. Catholic Church Property**

The following possibilities could be explored in the development of mixed-use projects on the parking lots to the north and south of Ristorante Fabrizio:

- a. Buildings could be constructed to create a consistent street edge on Magnolia Avenue.
- b. A small public plaza could be constructed along Magnolia Avenue on a portion of the site of the northern parking lot. If possible, this plaza could be connected to the use of the building on the site. It could be planted with a landmark tree or a grouping of trees.
- c. Parking could be accommodated at the back of all three buildings.
- d. The western edge of the parking lot could be lined with trees and other landscaping.

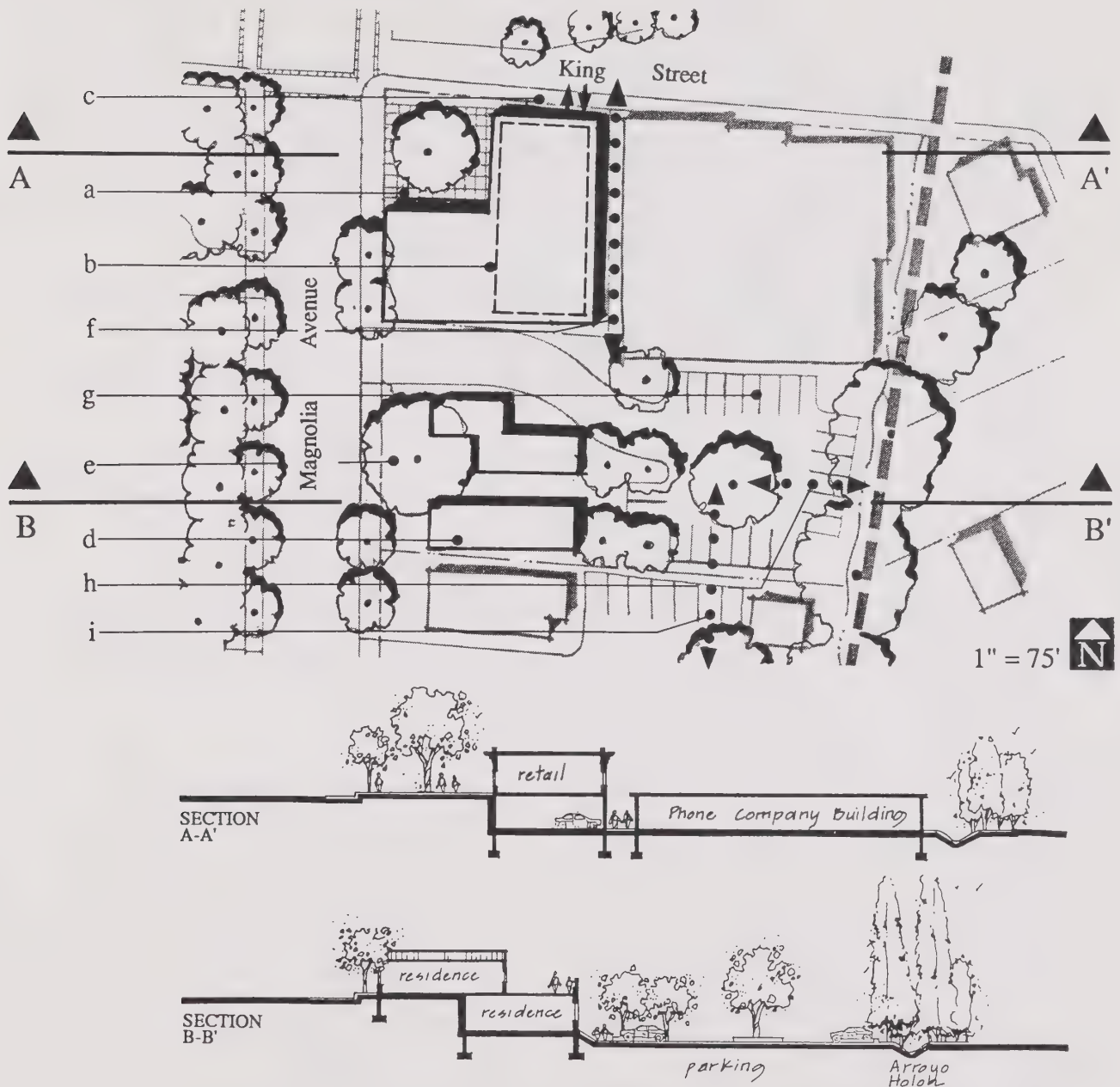
## 5. Fendler Property



The following possibilities could be explored in the development of vacant portions of the Fendler property:

- a. A mixed-use building could be constructed on the vacant Magnolia Avenue frontage.
- b. The parking lot on the eastern side of the site could be expanded to provide replacement parking for that lost on Magnolia, and to continue to serve housing on the site.
- c. The parking lot could be connected to Magnolia with a stairway.

## 6. Old Eubanks Property/Pacific Bell Property



The following possibilities could be explored if the Old Eubanks Building is replaced:

- a. A plaza serving City Hall and the southern Downtown could be constructed at the corner of King and Magnolia as part of the project. It could include distinctive plantings, such as a landmark tree or a grove of trees. The plaza could be designed to encourage people to gather,

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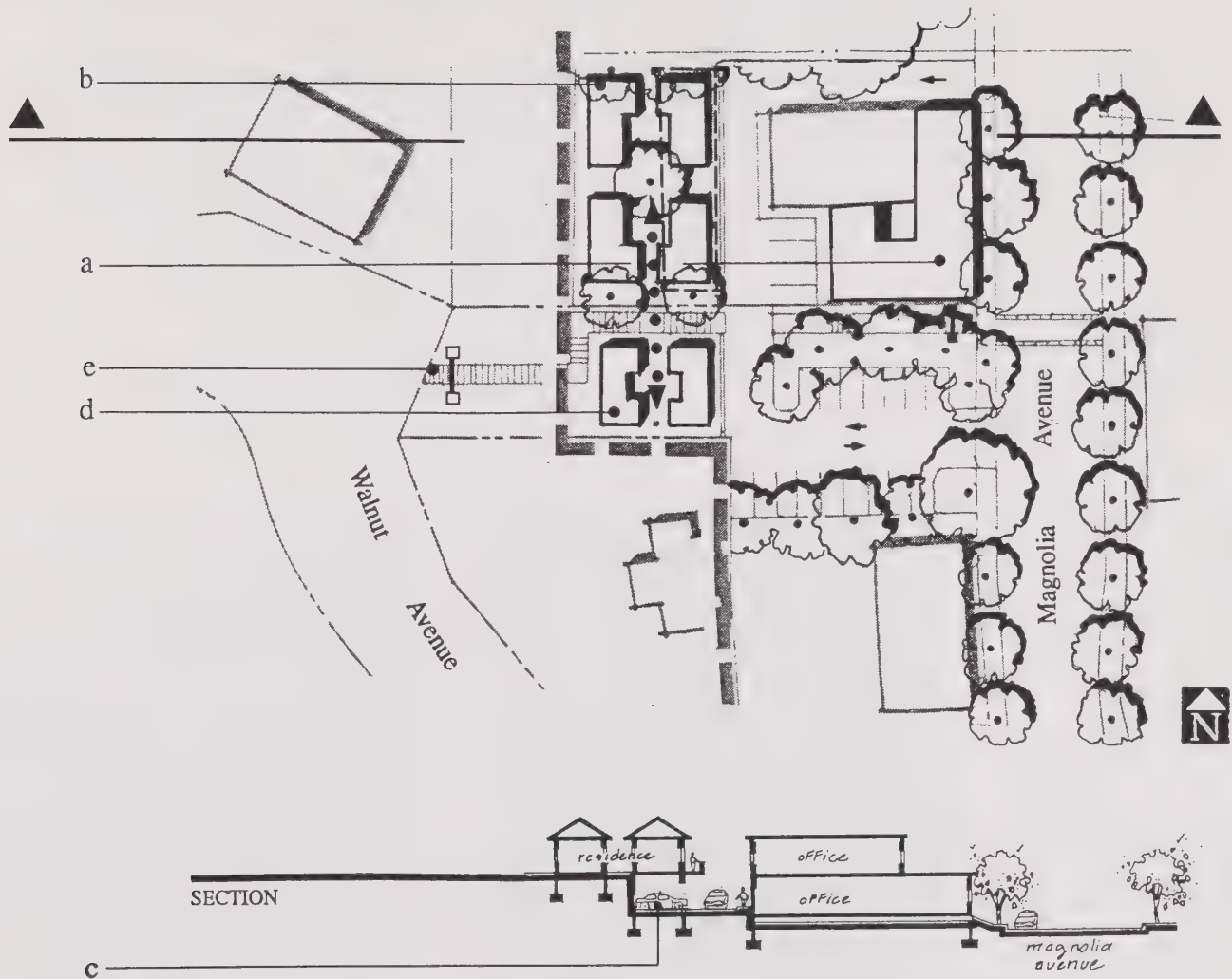
with adequate seating, shade and view orientation to the street.  
Building doors and openings should be oriented toward the plaza.

- b. Parking and service could be located under the building, taking advantage of the change of grade on the site.
- c. Access to parking on the site could be via King Street.

The following possibilities could be explored in development of the vacant and underutilized portions of the Pacific Bell property:

- d. Housing could be constructed at the front of the site, with a landscaped setback along Magnolia Avenue.
- e. The existing tree on the site could be retained, or replaced with a new landmark tree.
- f. Access to the rear of the site could be accommodated from King Street.
- g. The rear portion of the site could be paved as a parking lot, or utilized for other uses, provided that adequate parking for any on-site development could be accommodated.
- h. Pedestrian access could be provided to Arroyo Holon from the site.
- i. Access could be provided between the parking on site and the Lark Creek Shoppes.

## 7. Prahm Property/Arch Street



The following possibilities could be explored in the further development of the Prahm property:

- A new building could be placed in front of and next to the existing building on site to expand the building area on the site and improve the street facade of the existing development.
- Residential units could be built on the western side of the site, with access from the Arch Street steps, as at Rose Walk in Berkeley.
- Residential parking could be accommodated under the units, taking advantage of the change in grade on the site.

The following possibilities could be explored in the development of a parking lot and residences on the Arch Street right-of-way:

- d. Residential units could be built at the western end of the right-of-way, with access from the Arch Street steps, as at Rose Walk in Berkeley.
- e. The steps could be preserved as an important amenity and visual element on the site. They could be marked with gateway elements at both their ends at Magnolia and Walnut Avenues.



*The sites in Berkeley pictured above could serve as design models for development along stairways in Downtown Larkspur. The photo on the left shows the gateway on Vine Lane stairs; similar gateways could be constructed on both Post and Arch Streets. The right-hand photo shows Rose Walk, where housing is accessed from a stair, as proposed for Arch Street in this Specific Plan.*

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## **Chapter VIII**

### **CIRCULATION AND PARKING ELEMENT**



This element of the Specific Plan outlines plans for vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian circulation in the Downtown, and it outlines the plan's approach to automobile parking. Since circulation will generally follow the patterns already established in the Downtown, more emphasis is placed on parking provision, which will be revised considerably under the plan.

#### **A. Circulation and Parking Concepts**

The principal concepts that guide circulation and parking planning in the Downtown are:

- To create a Downtown environment that is friendly to vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians.
- To maintain and improve the existing bike path on the old railroad right-of-way.
- To provide adequate parking in the Downtown for all existing and future uses, without allowing parking requirements to become an impediment to development.

#### **B. Automobile Circulation**

##### **1. Existing Conditions**

Traffic circulation in the study area consists of both through and local movements, with Magnolia Avenue serving as the arterial through the Downtown. Traffic studies conducted in the recent past<sup>1</sup> indicated that average daily traffic (ADT) volumes on Magnolia Avenue were approximately

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<sup>1</sup>*Larkspur General Plan DEIR*, March 1990; *Larkspur General Plan*, 1990-2010, DKS Associates, 1990.

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12,000 vehicles. This is a relatively high volume of traffic for a two-lane commercial corridor, especially when one considers the high level of side friction from on-street parking, side streets, pedestrians and bicyclists. Peak hour Level of Service for the King Street/Magnolia Avenue intersection was measured as C/D, or borderline failing. Average speeds are slow (about 25 - 30 mph), yet the conflict between slower moving vehicles and through vehicles results in some safety hazards within the downtown area.

As in other small downtowns in Marin County, some of the most common traffic concerns among community members are related to the mixture of local and through traffic. Although Magnolia Avenue generally serves only as secondary arterial for through traffic, conflicts arise between those moving through town and those seeking parking or other destinations. During the parking surveys completed for the *Existing Conditions Report*, surveyors observed vehicles making illegal U-turns to reach parking spaces, and frequent passing across the median as vehicles slowed to park or drop people off. The four-way stop sign at King Street and Magnolia Avenue, along with a traffic signal at Magnolia and Ward, slows all traffic considerably and causes some queuing during peak periods.

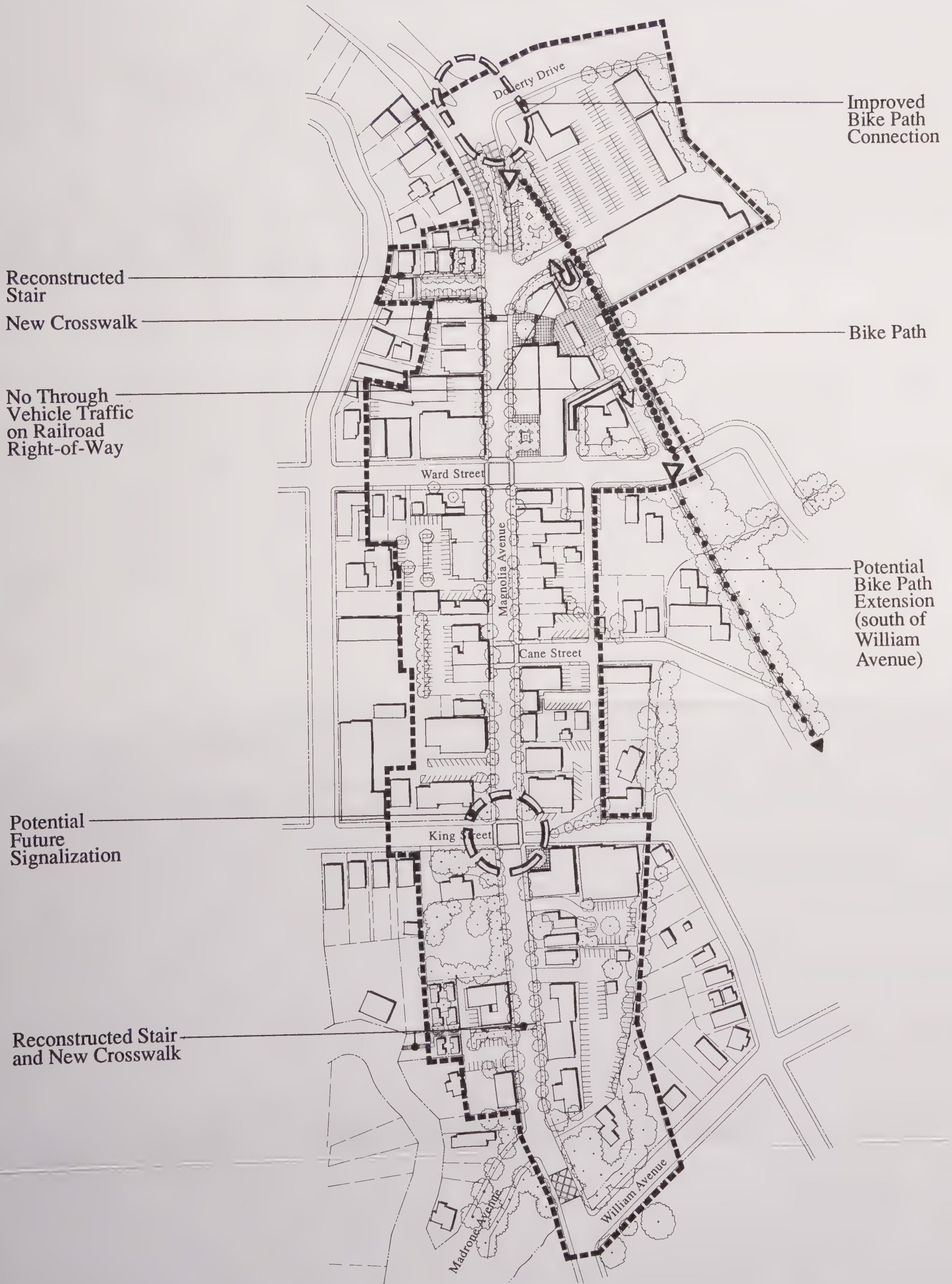
## **2. Specific Plan Policies and Actions**

Potential vehicle circulation improvements are mapped in Figure 7.

Under the Specific Plan, Magnolia Avenue will continue to function as the only through arterial in the Downtown. No new north-south streets will be constructed. Rice Lane will continue to function only as a one-way alley providing access for parking, service, and the improvements to the railroad right-of-way on the Nazari property should not allow for through vehicle circulation between Larkspur Plaza and Ward Street.

The City may evaluate operation of Magnolia Avenue in the future, with the possibility of making changes to intersection controls. If traffic volumes continue to increase, the King Street/Magnolia Avenue intersection may warrant signalization. However, any changes to intersection control on Magnolia Avenue must make pedestrian circulation and safety a primary consideration. Traffic improvements must balance local pedestrian and vehicle circulation needs with the needs of through traffic.

Figure 7 Potential Circulation Improvements



0 60' 120' 240'

LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN



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## **C. Bicycle Circulation**

### **1. Existing Conditions**

There are no signed bike lanes on public streets in the Downtown Larkspur study area. A combination bike and pedestrian path exists on the old Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way in the northeast corner of the study area. This path is well defined on the Nazari property as a paved way with a width of over 20 feet. Farther south, it is a paved path approximately 8 feet wide within a 70-foot landscaped corridor. Approximately 2 blocks south of the Downtown the path ceases to be paved, but it continues as an unpaved (and in some places inaccessible) corridor to Corte Madera. To the north, the path continues along the triangular land owned by the City adjacent to Larkspur Plaza, and it then dies into Magnolia Avenue before crossing Doherty Drive. Although there is a dedicated bike path along Magnolia north of Doherty, the bike crossing of Doherty for bicycles is poorly signed and may present safety hazards.<sup>2</sup>

Bicyclists are apparent throughout the Downtown on both weekdays and weekends, with the volumes rising appreciably on weekends. The narrow street width and heavily crowned surface of Magnolia Avenue, particularly near the intersection with Madrone, poses some problems since it forces bicycles and vehicles to mix. However, slow speeds in the area seem to minimize this potential hazard.

It appears that a relatively small number of bicyclists stop in Larkspur, even on weekends. Bike racks are limited and are generally not located near shops and restaurants. There are no stores catering to bicyclists in the Downtown.

### **2. Specific Plan Policies and Actions**

Potential improvements to bicycle circulation under the Specific Plan are mapped in Figure 7.

The main focus of Downtown bicycle circulation improvements will be on the Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way. The City will negotiate with developers on the Nazari property to ensure that the property is retained as a bike path before its development, and that the development scheme for the site includes an improved bike path. The bike path, which is shown in the

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<sup>2</sup>This problem is also identified in the City's General Plan, pages 156-157.

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design guidelines for the Nazari property in Chapter VII, should meet the requirements for a Class I bike path.

At the northern end of the Downtown, the bicycle path may be realigned through the City property adjacent to Larkspur Plaza to more clearly continue along the right side of Magnolia Avenue to the crossing of Doherty Drive. A curb cut in this area would allow bicycles to pass smoothly from the bike path to the road bed, and a bike lane striped on the roadway would provide a clear path to the intersection. On the north leg of the intersection, outside the Specific Plan area, the City will also explore restriping Magnolia Avenue to create a bike lane connecting to the existing bike path along Corte Madera Creek. The City will also explore creation of a bike path along Doherty Drive to Redwood High School.

Under the City's General Plan, the City will also explore the possibility of paving the railroad right-of-way south and east of the Downtown, to create a paved bicycle route from the Downtown to Corte Madera and San Francisco Bay.

Under the Specific Plan Street Furniture Program, the City may also install bicycle racks in the Downtown. Bicycle racks should be located where they are convenient to riders, preferably near the entrances to buildings and in public spaces, but so that they do not conflict with pedestrian or automobile circulation.

No restriping or other improvements should be made to improve bicycle circulation on Magnolia Avenue. The narrow roadway width, high traffic volume and large number of cars parking on this street make provision of a safe and enjoyable bike lane impossible, and such a bike lane would draw use away from the planned improvements to the railroad right-of-way bike path.

## **D. Pedestrian Circulation**

### **1. Existing Conditions**

Pedestrian circulation in Downtown Larkspur is generally light to moderate, and existing sidewalks and crosswalks all meet minimum standards for safety, especially since the recent repaving with brick and concrete at the intersections of Magnolia Avenue with Ward, Cane and King Streets. This type of sidewalk delineation marginally improves pedestrian safety since it is visually distinctive

and creates a slight change in roadway surface that is perceptible to motorists.

Jay-walking is a common occurrence in Downtown Larkspur due to the narrow street width and frequent breaks in traffic. Pedestrians frequently cut between parked cars to jaywalk, almost oblivious to traffic on this seemingly quiet street, posing a safety hazard. However, these are standard occurrences in a Downtown setting, and they cannot necessarily be rectified if the Downtown is to be a vital shopping and civic center.

## **2. Specific Plan Policies and Actions**

Potential pedestrian circulation improvements are mapped in Figure 7.

Most policies and actions that would improve pedestrian circulation under the Specific Plan are outlined in other sections of this document. For example, the street furniture program described in the Urban Design Element will include pedestrian amenities such as benches, and the potential signalization of the Magnolia/King intersection would improve pedestrian safety crossing the street at this intersection.

In addition, the City will continue to evaluate the need for additional crosswalks and other pedestrian amenities. This Specific Plan also suggests construction of new crosswalks at the Post Street and Arch Street parking lots to facilitate crossing to the east side of the street. These crosswalks would be designed to match the brick and concrete crosswalks that were recently installed with the Magnolia Avenue reconstruction project.

## **E. Parking**

This section describes existing parking conditions in the Downtown, and outlines new parking requirements and facilities for the area. Financing of parking construction and distribution of parking rights through a Parking District is described in Chapter IX.

### **1. Existing Conditions**

The following findings regarding existing parking conditions in the Downtown are taken from the *Existing Conditions Report*:

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General Parking Availability. Current parking conditions in Downtown Larkspur do not appear to limit or constrain land use or productivity. There appears to be sufficient parking to accommodate demand generated by current uses. While it may not always be possible to park directly in front of one's destination, it is possible to find parking within at least one or two blocks of all land uses. Since the Downtown's environment is generally safe and interesting, a walk of one or two blocks is considered acceptable for employees, visitors and shoppers.

Current Parking Concerns. Although the existing overall parking supply is adequate, there are several existing concerns regarding the parking:

- The Lark Creek Inn currently produces spillover parking onto City streets during peak parking hours, which are weekdays at lunch time and weekend evenings.
- The Lark Theater and other evening uses produce a minor, localized parking shortfall in the early evening hours on weekends, but alternative parking for the theater and other uses is available within one or two blocks of each use.
- While the current parking supply is adequate, the fragmentation of parking into small lots results in inefficient usage. Individual lots are often inefficiently designed, and many small lots are less efficient than a smaller numbers of large lots.
- There is a slight shortage of long-term daytime employee parking in the immediate vicinity of City Hall and St. Patrick's Church and School. Employees may park on residential streets, and may have to walk two to three blocks from their parking spaces to their offices. This is generally considered acceptable in an urban setting, so no remedial action is recommended in this Specific Plan.
- Local residents and merchants have indicated that commuters to San Francisco or other areas may park in or near the Downtown.

Future Parking Availability. Although there is currently a generally adequate supply of parking in the Downtown, this may be a reflection of the low levels of usage currently in the area. Thus any future expansion in the area should provide additional parking.

City Parking Requirements. The existing City of Larkspur parking requirements are unnecessarily restrictive, especially in light of the available parking supply. The requirements exceed industry standards that generally

serve as the basis for local parking requirements, and they probably result in unnecessary restrictions on land use intensity.

## **2. Parking Management**

In order to accommodate growth in Downtown Larkspur as defined in the Downtown Plan, an increase in the utilization and number of parking spaces will be required. Without some type of parking management program, it is unlikely that the future supply will meet future demand in many locations. This Specific Plan suggests that parking management occur through a parking assessment district. This district, and alternatives to it, are described in Chapter IX

## **3. Revised Parking Requirements**

As stated above, there is currently an excess parking supply in the Downtown, and the existing parking requirements found in the zoning code are quite high. For this reason, this Specific Plan revises the parking requirements for the Downtown Area, as shown in Table 4. These revised parking requirements are intended to provide adequate parking to serve all current and future land uses, while also avoiding unnecessary restrictions on development or the use of existing buildings. These requirements will replace all existing City parking requirements in the Downtown, including the requirement that new uses demand equal or less parking than the previous uses in a building.

In this section, the term "use" refers to the type of land use, such as retail, restaurant or office, and not to specific types of stores or tenants within these categories.

The parking requirements are applied in two different ways within the Downtown, as described below. In the following section, **bold type** indicates actual parking policy. While regular type gives background on the policy.

### **a. Storefront Downtown.**

(1) **Application to New Construction.** All new construction or building additions in the Storefront Downtown must supply parking at the rates shown in Table 4, either on- or off-site, or through other methods found acceptable by the City, with the following exceptions:

- **Retail or office additions to existing buildings in the Storefront Downtown that do not increase the total building area on site to a**

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**Floor Area Ratio greater than .80 need not supply additional parking on site, provided that no parking is removed from the site as a part of the project.**

- **Newly constructed restaurant space in a building that does not exceed a total FAR of .80 is required to supply 4.4 spaces per 1,000 square feet.** Restaurants are required to supply additional parking because they generally generate demand for parking roughly three times as great as similarly sized office or retail uses.

**(2) Application to Existing Buildings. The parking requirements shown in Table 4 generally do not apply to existing buildings in the Storefront Downtown. Existing buildings may accommodate any use. However, the following exceptional uses in existing buildings require provision of additional parking on- or off-site, or compliance with other parking supply measures deemed appropriate by the City:**

- **Changes to residential use, which must supply one parking space for each unit.** Residences must supply parking on site since future residents are likely to expect this convenience.
- **Changes to hotel/inn use, which must supply one parking space for each room.** Hotels and inns must supply parking on site since guests are likely to expect this convenience.
- **New restaurants, which must supply 4.4 spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area. Existing restaurants, and new restaurants that are established in buildings whose current use is a restaurant, do not need to fulfill this requirement, and may rely on the existing parking supply.<sup>3</sup>** Restaurants are required to supply additional parking because they generally generate demand for parking roughly three times as great as similarly sized office or retail uses.

**b. Garden and Transitional Downtown. The parking requirements shown in Table 4 apply to all existing buildings and new construction in the Garden and Transitional Downtown districts.**

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<sup>3</sup>For example, a new restaurant in a 1,000 square foot building would need to supply four parking spaces on-site, or pay for 4.4 spaces through parking assessment district fees. These new spaces would have to be supplied regardless of whether parking already existed on the site.

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**Table 4**  
**Comparison of Existing and New**  
**Downtown Parking Requirements**

Use	New Requirement	Existing Requirement
Retail	2.6 spaces per 1,000 square feet	5.0 to 6.1 spaces per 1,000 square feet
Restaurant	4.4 or 7.0 spaces per 1,000 square feet <sup>a</sup>	12.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet
Office	2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet	4.0 spaces per 1,000 square feet
Residential	1 space per dwelling unit	1 space per dwelling unit <u>plus</u> 0.8 to 1.5 spaces per unit for guest parking

<sup>a</sup> See text for explanation

- For a change of use in an existing building, applicants must show that all uses on their site will have adequate parking, either on site or through compliance with other parking supply measures deemed appropriate by the City.
- For new construction, adequate parking to serve all uses in the project must be supplied on site or through compliance with other parking supply measures deemed appropriate by the City.

#### **4. Future and Improved Parking Facilities**

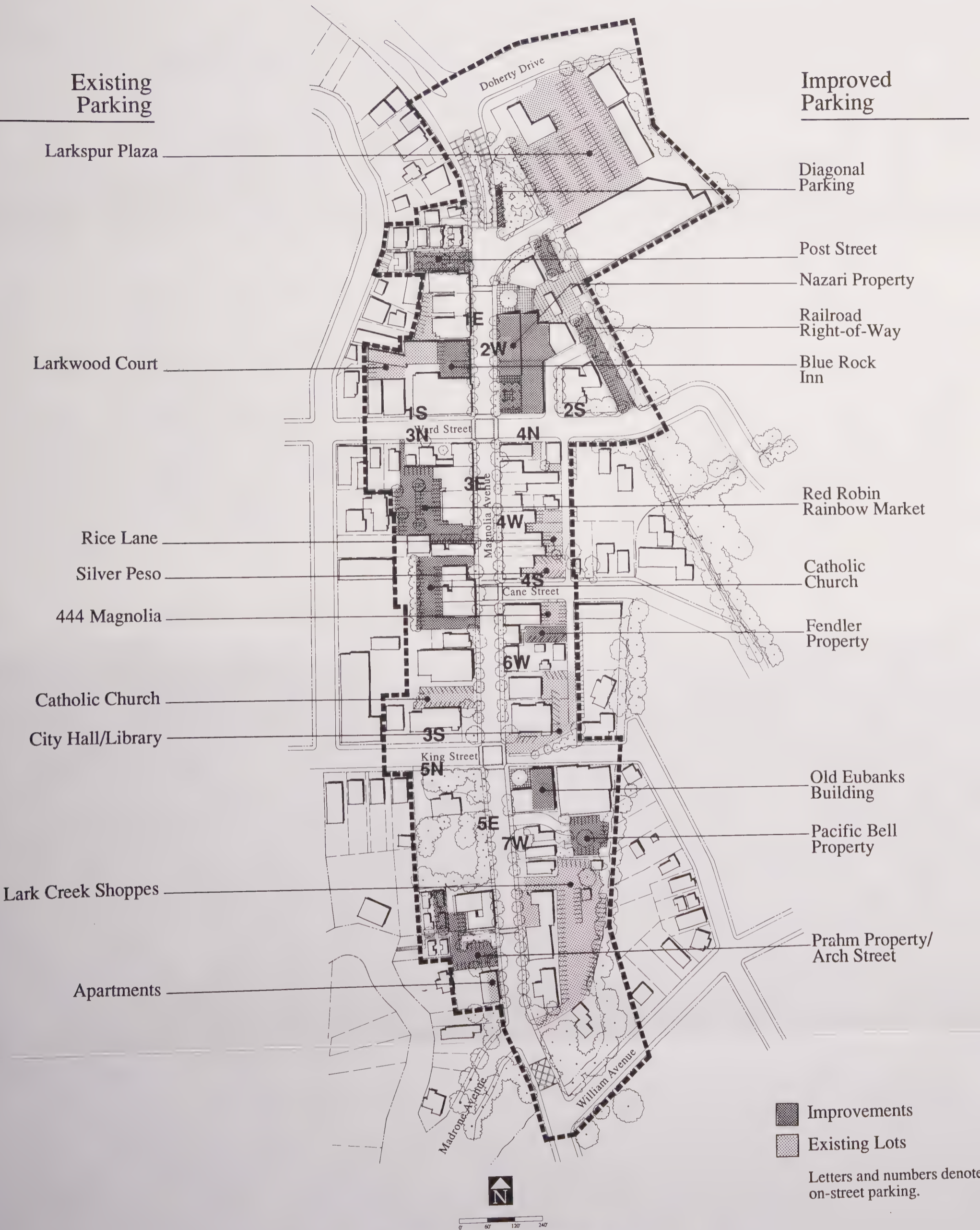
The parking improvements described below are foreseen under the Specific Plan, and are mapped in Figure 8.

- **The Nazari Property project** may include a semi-underground parking structure to accommodate the parking demand of the project itself. The structure would take advantage of the natural grade on the site, so that it would be underground along Magnolia Avenue, but has an at-grade entry on its rear side near the American Legion Hall.
- **The Nazari Property project** may also include roughly 28 spaces in the railroad right-of-way, which would be used as public parking to replace the Ward/Magnolia lot.
- **Post Street** may be paved as a City parking lot with roughly 12 spaces. The lot would be unrestricted, and would be expected to be used by residences to the north of Post Street that presently have inadequate parking.

- 
- **The Blue Rock Inn property**, if redeveloped with retail space on Magnolia Avenue north of the inn, would be required to replace the parking currently on site, possibly with roof-top parking that would be entered from the Larkwood Court parking lot.
  - **Behind Red Robin and Rainbow Market**, the City will encourage the landowners to restripe the existing parking lot to accommodate more parking. Approximately 7 extra spaces could easily be accommodated, which represents an increase of about 20 percent. The new total of 43 would meet the demand currently generated by the buildings served by this lot.
  - **The Catholic Church properties** to the north and south of Ristorante Fabrizio, if redeveloped with mixed use buildings, should be designed to include a parking lot with roughly 30 spaces in the existing northern school playground. The City may also negotiate with the Church to make parking available in the playground area even if no development project occurs.
  - **The upper Fendler property**, which currently accommodates an unpaved parking lot, may be paved and striped to accommodate 8 vehicles, if the lower Fendler lot is developed with a mixed use project. The lot would be connected to Magnolia Avenue and the existing dental offices with a stair.
  - **The old Eubanks property**, if redeveloped, would be required to provide public parking on site, possibly in a garage under the structure that takes advantage of the existing change in grade on the site. The City may work to lease any excess parking capacity on this site for public use.
  - **On the Pacific Bell property**, the City may work with the phone company to repave the existing parking lot on the eastern part of the site and to make this lot available for public parking.
  - **Arch Street and the associated City-owned lot to the south** may be paved as a City parking lot. The lot could serve the Prahm property during the day, and would be available for overflow parking from the Lark Creek Inn at night.

Diagonal parking could also be installed in the City-owned triangular property adjacent to Larkspur Plaza on Magnolia Avenue, accommodating 12 to 16 spaces. This parking could impact traffic circulation on Magnolia Avenue, but it would be consistent with the idea of slowing down traffic through Larkspur

Figure 8 Potential Parking in the Downtown



LARKSPUR  
DOWNTOWN  
SPECIFIC PLAN



to enhance the pedestrian environment. Therefore, this parking will be installed only if necessary toward the end of plan buildout, since it would unnecessarily inhibit traffic flow in the interim. This parking is not included in the supply and demand projections or the Financing and Implementation Element in Chapter VIII.

## **5. Projected Parking Supply and Demand**

The projected parking supply for the Downtown after completion of the projects described above is projected shown in Table 5, and would total 737 spaces, of which 635 spaces would be available to non-residents of the Downtown to support retail, office, entertainment or other uses. This represents an increase of roughly 25 spaces (4 percent) over existing supply, even though a number of existing parking lots would be replaced with buildings under the Specific Plan.

Table 6 shows projected peak parking demand at Specific Plan buildout for non-residential uses, which is projected at a maximum of 653 spaces. Demand has been calculated for all illustrative projects described in this Specific Plan, and for increases in square footage to FAR = .80 on all other sites in the Storefront Downtown. No additional development beyond the illustrative projects is assumed for Larkspur Plaza or the Garden Downtown, since these areas would be subject to strict design controls, and since any expansion would have to provide parking on site. Other projects creating small amounts of additional parking demand in the Storefront Downtown might also be possible if the illustrated projects are implemented differently than shown in this Specific Plan, but no significant amounts of additional unmet parking demand are expected.

Demand has been calculated for a weekday at 1 p.m., when studies show that demand for parking in a mixed-use environment such as the Downtown is highest. Demand projections are based on rates supplied by the Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE), and prorated according to the Urban Land Institute's Shared Parking Factors. Restaurant rates are slightly lower than the adjusted ITE rates, since the ITE rates are for all types of restaurants, including very high volume establishments that would be unlikely to occur in Larkspur. Table 6 shows the total projected square footage for each land use, the demand rate associated with it, and the total parking demand created by it. This parking demand represents the peak demand at one time on a typical weekday; demand at all other times on weekdays, and on weekends, would be less.

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**Table 5**  
**Projected Specific Plan Parking Supply**

Street or Block Designation	Existing Conditions			Specific Plan Buildout		
	Off Street Residential	Off Street Public Spaces	On Street Spaces	Off Street Residential	Off Street Public Spaces	On Street Spaces
1E (On Street)			11			11
1S (On Street)			6			6
Kobuchi	10			10		
Larkwood	35			35		
North of Post Street	5			5		
Post Street	10	2		15		
2S (On Street)			11			11
2W (On Street)			3			3
Larkspur Plaza		190			149	
City Lot at Ward/ Magnolia		28				
Nazari Property		33			119 <sup>a</sup>	
3N (On Street)			5			5
3E (On Street)			14			14
3S (On Street)			8			8
Donut Alley/ Red Robin		36		5	38	
Fabrizio north		11				
Fabrizio south		13		4	29	
Catholic Church <sup>b</sup>		22			0	
4N (On Street)			4			4
4S (On Street)			4			4

(continued)

<sup>a</sup> Includes 28 spaces in the railroad right-of-way that would replace the Ward/Magnolia lot.

<sup>b</sup> This lot is not projected to supply future parking because it is closed to the public.

Street or Block Designation	Existing Conditions			Specific Plan Buildout		
	Off Street Residential	Off Street Public Spaces	On Street Spaces	Off Street Residential	Off Street Public Spaces	On Street Spaces
4W (On Street)			11			11
Silver Peso	2	12		2	12	
Savings & Loan		4			2	
Rice Lane	5	5		5	7	
5N (On Street)			7			7
5E (On Street)			12			12
Prahm Property		6		4	9	
Arch Street		6		2	13	
Co Enos Apts	6			6		
6W (On Street)			6			6
Fendler Apts	3	3		3	5	
City Hall		16			16	
Library		4			4	
Fendler Dental Bldg.		10				
444 Magnolia		12			12	
7W (On Street)			10			10
Lark Creek Shoppes		69			69	
Lark Creek Shoppes (front)		9			5	
Old Eubanks		7			18	
Pacific Bell property				6	16	
Total Spaces	76	498	112	102	523	112
Total Spaces	686			737		
Total Without Residence	610			635		

**Table 6**  
**Projected Specific Plan Parking Demand**  
**Weekdays 1pm<sup>a</sup>**

Land Use <sup>b</sup>	Retail	Restaurant	Office
Total Units <sup>c</sup>	118,100 sq.ft.	18,200 sq.ft.	93,400 sq.ft.
Demand Rate	2.6 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft.	7.0 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft.	2.5 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft.
Demand (spaces)	307 spaces	127 spaces	234 spaces
<b>Total Peak Hour Demand</b>	<b>668 spaces</b>		

<sup>a</sup> This table represents peak shared parking demand in the Downtown at Specific Plan buildout, which has been calculated to occur weekdays at 1 p.m. Total parking demand at other times would be less.

<sup>b</sup> This table does not include residential uses since all residences in the Downtown currently supply adequate parking on their sites, and since future residential projects would be required to do the same.

<sup>c</sup> Quantities are taken from Table 2, which includes both specific projects foreseen in the Illustrative Plan, and the allowed expansion of buildings in the Storefront Downtown to FAR=.80.

A comparison of Tables 5 and 6 shows that parking demand under Specific Plan buildout would exceed maximum parking supply by 33 spaces. The City has considered this minor parking shortfall, and has found that it would not constitute a significant problem in the Downtown, especially since it would only occur at peak demand times. At most times, demand would be lower, so a surplus parking supply would exist.

The difference between parking supply and demand could be slightly different than that shown in this analysis if development projects differ from those shown in the illustrative plan. However, this analysis represents the best available approximation of parking supply and demand at Specific Plan buildout, and no significant deviations from it are expected.

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## **Chapter IX**

### **FINANCING AND IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENT**

■ ■ ■

This chapter outlines the administrative, financing and regulatory approaches that may be followed to effectively implement the Specific Plan.

#### **A. Development Review and Regulation**

The following regulatory steps will be taken by the City of Larkspur upon adoption of the Specific Plan to implement the provisions of this plan.

##### **1. Findings Regarding the Specific Plan**

No subdivision, use permit, design review application, or other entitlement for use, and no public improvement, will be authorized in the planning area until a finding has been made that the proposed project is in substantial compliance with this Specific Plan. Approval of final development plans and use permits will be contingent upon a determination of substantial compliance with the applicable provisions of the City of Larkspur General Plan and this Specific Plan.

##### **2. Changes to the Zoning Code**

To bring City zoning codes within the planning area into consistency with this Specific Plan and ensure effective implementation of design and development standards, the City will incorporate into its zoning code the land use and parking specifications found in Chapters VI and VIII, respectively.

##### **3. Creation of a Signage Ordinance**

The City of Larkspur may enact a signage ordinance that sets guidelines for pedestrian-oriented signage in the Downtown. The ordinance would allow for signage consistent with the historic, pedestrian-scaled character of the Downtown, and would set clear guidelines regarding size, color, materials and methods of attachment for signs. Once developed, the signage ordinance would be adopted as a part of the City's zoning code.

**Table 7**  
**Public Improvements**

<b>Improvement</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Preliminary Cost Estimate</b>
Street Trees.	Approximately 70 street trees @ 20' to 30' on center. Minimum 36" box.	\$80,000 - 100,000
Street Furniture.	Coordinated program of benches, trash cans, news racks, mail boxes, bike racks.	\$20,000 - 25,000
Northern Gateway.	Ornamental paving at between Doherty Drive and Post Street. Installation of landmark redwood trees. Monumental sign marking entry to Downtown.	\$100,000 - 120,000
Southern Gateway.	Ornamental paving between Madrone and William Avenue.	\$20,000 - 25,000
Magnolia/Doherty Bike Path.	Realignment of the bicycle path in the triangular parcel next to Larkspur Plaza. Curb cut for access to Magnolia Avenue. Restriping of Magnolia/Doherty intersection.	\$8,000 - 10,000
Stairs and crosswalks on Arch and Post Street.	Improved stairs with ornamental gateways and handrails connecting Arch and Post Streets to Walnut and Locust Avenues. New brick and concrete crosswalks across Magnolia Avenue.	\$65,000 - 80,000
<b>TOTAL COST</b>		<b>\$293,000 - 360,000</b>

### **B. Public Improvements**

The City may fund public improvements required under the Specific Plan through a Landscaping and Lighting District, which would be established by the City pursuant to the State Landscaping and Lighting Act of 1972 or other similar enabling legislation. The 1972 Act allows for the installation and maintenance of various street improvements, including ornamental paving, benches, trees and other street furniture, as described in Chapter VI and shown in Table 7.

The process for establishing an assessment district would begin with a formal proposal from the City Council. A public hearing would be held and affected landowners would be given an opportunity to protest the district formation. A

majority protest could be overridden by four-fifths vote of the City Council. Once approved, the City would issue a bond and utilize the proceeds to cover the costs of the proposed streetscape improvements.

Each parcel within the Landscaping and Lighting District would be assessed for repayment of the bond; the assessed amount would be based on the relative benefit a parcel receives from the improvements. Potential measures of relative benefit include building size, parcel size, linear frontage on Magnolia Avenue, and land use. According to State law, the total assessed amount cannot exceed the total cost of the project.

The City would conduct a study to determine the exact scope of the projects to be constructed within the Landscaping and Lighting District, the associated costs, and the fairest methods for assigning costs to individual properties. The City could make a contribution to the District from General Fund monies to offset the benefit that the District would bring to the entire city. Preliminary calculations indicate that the average assessment in the area would be 12 to 20 cents per square foot of building per year over the bond life of 20 to 30 years.

### **C. Parking Finance**

#### **1. Projected Facilities**

Major Specific Plan parking improvements are described in Chapter IX, and are also listed in Table 8. For implementation purposes, the parking facilities shown in Table 8 may be broken into three basic types:

- Public facilities on publicly-owned land, including Arch Street, Post Street and the Ward/Magnolia parking lot. Under the illustrative project for the Nazari property shown in this plan, the City may trade the Ward/Magnolia lot for the railroad right-of-way, in which case this would be publicly owned.
- Public facilities on privately-owned land, including the Pacific Bell and Catholic Church properties. On both these sites, the City may negotiate with the landowners to lease their properties for public parking as the need for increased parking arises.

**Table 8**  
**Public Parking Improvements**

Improvement	Description	Number of Spaces	Estimated Monthly Costs			
			Construc- tion <sup>a</sup>	Land Lease <sup>b</sup>	Oper. & Maint. <sup>c</sup>	Total
Arch Street parking lot	Paving of Arch Street and neighboring property.	15	\$241	\$1,288 <sup>d</sup>	\$125	\$1,654
Post Street parking lot	Paving of Post Street with a parking lot.	12	193 <sup>e</sup>	None	100	293
Public parking in the railroad right-of-way	Provision of parking spaces to replace parking to be lost in the Ward/Magnolia lot through the Nazari development.	28	None <sup>e</sup>	None <sup>e</sup>	233	233
Pacific Bell parking lot	Paving of eastern portion of the Pacific Bell site for public use.	16	257	1,360	133	1,750
Public parking behind Fabrizio	Public parking as part of building development on existing parking lots.	29	467	2,465	242	3,174
Larkspur Plaza public parking	Acquisition of public parking rights to the parking surplus in the shopping center after Lucky expansion.	38	None <sup>f</sup>	3,230	None <sup>g</sup>	3,230
Old Eubanks site	Acquisition of public parking rights to excess spaces in a new building on the old Eubanks site.	7	None <sup>h</sup>	595	None <sup>h</sup>	595
<b>Totals</b>		<b>145</b>	<b>\$1,158</b>	<b>\$8,938</b>	<b>\$833</b>	<b>\$10,929</b>
<b>Cost per space per month</b>						<b>\$75.37</b>

<sup>a</sup> Assumes costs of \$2,000 per space, financed with a 30-year bond at 9 percent annual interest.

<sup>b</sup> Assumes lease of raw land at \$3 per square foot per year, or \$0.25 per month, and 340 square feet per parking space.

<sup>c</sup> Assumes operating and maintenance costs of \$100 per space per year, or \$8.33 per space per month.

<sup>d</sup> Actual purchase price of the lot south of Arch Street of \$160,000, amortized at 9 percent interest over 30 years.

<sup>e</sup> Assumes that land acquisition and construction would occur as exactions for the Nazari property, since this parking would replace parking already owned and operated by the City.

<sup>f</sup> This parking already exists, so no construction costs would occur.

<sup>g</sup> Assumes maintenance would continue to be provided by Larkspur Plaza.

<sup>h</sup> Assumes that parking construction and on-going maintenance would be provided by the developer as conditions of approval for the project.

- Public access to private facilities, including Larkspur Plaza and the old Eubanks site. The City may negotiate with landowners to make existing or future surplus on these sites available as conditions of approval for projects on the sites. A similar approach could be taken on the Catholic Church property if a project is proposed on the existing parking lots.

## **2. Parking Assessment District**

Table 8 shows construction, land lease and operating costs associated with the recommended parking facilities. The City may meet these costs for parking provision through payments to a Parking Assessment District.

A Parking Assessment District (PAD) is a City body created to manage parking resources and fund new resources on an equitable basis. The key advantages of a PAD in Larkspur would be:

- lessening of the financial burden for parking provision on the City;
- equitable distribution of parking resources;
- provision of future supply to meet land use objectives from the Downtown Plan;
- improved parking utilization Downtown; and
- flexibility for property owners in meeting parking requirements.

Unlike other assessment districts, in which all property owners are assessed a fee for services, the proposed PAD would levy assessments only on those who have parking deficits and require off-site parking. Costs would be financed through one-time or monthly fees paid to the PAD by developers of projects or owners of businesses with parking deficits, as determined according to the parking requirements in Chapter VIII. Developers or merchants with projects or new uses that do not supply parking on site in accordance with the regulations in Chapter VIII would pay a fee to the PAD equivalent to the cost of supplying replacement off-site. The PAD would use funds collected to construct and operate the facilities listed.

The mechanism for creating the PAD would be similar to that described for the Landscaping and Lighting District, above. Construction financing would be derived by bonds issued by the PAD, with the City providing the needed credit rating. No facility would be leased or constructed until all spaces in a lot were subscribed, and binding commitments to cover all fixed and annual costs received from property owners.

The City would conduct engineering studies to ascertain the appropriate assessment fees. Table 8 shows that costs are likely to total approximately \$70 to \$80 per space per month, which could be offset by a one-time fee of \$8,700 to \$10,000. While these rates may seem high, it is important to bear in mind that they are based on land costs of \$30 to \$50 per square foot, which make the land alone for a single parking space cost \$9,000 to \$15,000. The City might be able to lower these costs by supplying operations and maintenance funds out of General Fund monies, or by obtaining lower land lease prices than those shown in Table 8 through negotiations and the project approval process.

### **3. Alternative Parking Implementation Approaches**

If the City is unable to receive approval for the proposed Parking Assessment District, the improvements listed in Table 8 and the overall management of the parking supply could be effected through a combination of public and private initiatives.

In this approach, the City would negotiate with private parties to pave the railroad right-of-way, Post Street and Arch Street as conditions of approval for proposed projects, or else the City would pay for these projects through its General Fund.

Under this alternative approach, owners of private projects with parking deficits would be required to lease spaces from businesses that have an excess of spaces according to the parking requirements. Project approval would be contingent on a long-term lease being signed between the two owners, and the spaces would have to be readily accessible by new customers and/or employees. The land owner who leases the excess spaces would also be constrained from changing their land use to one with a higher parking requirement during the life of the lease. This constraint would be attached to the deed of the property and passed to a new owner.

This approach is not recommended because it would be difficult to administer and oversee, would not lead to a large pool of centrally-managed parking spaces, and would require coordination between landowners before development could occur. However, this approach would provide an alternative if a parking assessment district could not be approved.

#### D. Land Owner Improvements

The improvements listed below may be completed through the private initiatives of the land owners in the Downtown. All of these improvements would benefit the land owners in question, while also helping to create a stronger urban fabric and increase economic viability in the Downtown as a whole. In most cases, these private improvements could be tied to exactions or conditions of approval for development projects foreseen under the Plan:

- **Nazari Property.** The City could use its ownership interest in the Ward/Magnolia lot as a bargaining tool to exact from the developer the provision of a public plaza at Ward and Magnolia, the extension of the bicycle path through a landscaped corridor in the railroad right-of-way, the provision of replacement parking for the Ward/Magnolia lot in the old railroad right-of-way, and the development of a plaza around the railroad buildings that connects the Nazari property to Larkspur Plaza. Other exactions may also be required.
- **Larkspur Plaza.** As a condition of approval for future expansion, the City could require the Lucky Store in Larkspur Plaza to coordinate its design with the provision of a plaza linking Larkspur Plaza with the Nazari property.
- **Plaza at King and Magnolia.** A public plaza at the corner of King and Magnolia, which will serve City Hall and the southern Downtown, could be developed as a condition of approval for redevelopment of the old Eubanks building.
- **Plaza north of Fabrizio.** A public plaza outside of a potential community service use or cafe in the new buildings on the Catholic Church property could be developed as a condition of approval for development on the existing parking lots.

The City of Larkspur could also play a key role in initiating projects and negotiating with land owners regarding improvements to be completed, and in encouraging land owners to undertake projects that will benefit the community as a whole. Specific sites where City initiative and negotiations may be necessary include:

- **Nazari Property.** The Specific Plan foresees development of this key Downtown parcel in conjunction with a development on the City's Ward/Magnolia parking lot. The project may occur through sale of the parking lot to a developer, a landscape involving the City parking lot and the railroad right-of-way, long-term lease, or joint development between the City and a developer.
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- **Catholic Church Property.** The City may negotiate with the Catholic Church regarding potential development on the parking lots to the north and south of Ristorante Fabrizio, and regarding potential use of a portion of the lower St. Patrick's School playground as a public parking lot. Church administrators in Larkspur have indicated that the Church is interested in constructing either senior housing or church offices on the site, and that the playground is currently underutilized. However, City initiative may be necessary to facilitate these projects, and possibly to introduce the Church to private or non-profit developers who could aid in project construction.
- **Pacific Bell Property.** The City may negotiate with Pacific Bell regarding the future disposition of the vacant and underutilized portions of the Pacific Bell property in the Downtown. If Pacific Bell is able to relinquish this property, the City may attempt to locate a developer for it. If Pacific Bell chooses to continue to hold the property, the City may negotiate with Pacific Bell to allow development of a public parking lot on some portion of it.
- **Post Office.** The Postal Service has indicated that it may be interested in moving the Larkspur Post Office to a new facility in the next few years. The City should maintain contact with Postal Service staff to ascertain the Post Office's needs and relocation plans, and may help to locate a suitable facility for a new Post Office. The Nazari property is the most appropriate place for a post office in the Downtown.
- **Arch and Post Housing Developments.** The Specific Plan foresees small housing developments on the western ends of both Arch and Post Streets. Although the City clearly has access rights within these rights-of-way, it is not clear whether the City holds fee title to these properties. If a title search indicates that the City does hold title to these properties, then it may sell portions of them for housing development. If another party holds title, then the City may enter into negotiations with that party to find a development alternative that is attractive to everyone concerned.
- **Red Robin/Rainbow Market Parking Lot.** The City may encourage and assist the owners of the three properties that share this parking lot to restripe it more efficiently. Currently, the lot does not supply enough parking to meet demand generated by the buildings it serves.

### **E. City Programs**

The City may take the following additional steps to ensure full implementation of the Specific Plan.

#### **1. California Main Street Program**

The California Main Street Program, operated by the State Department of Commerce Office of Local Development, is designed to help small cities with less than 50,000 in population to strengthen and revitalize their downtown shopping districts. The Main Street Program includes 14 Demonstration Cities which were initiated between 1985 and 1988, as well as 13 independent cities which receive more limited technical assistance. Larkspur applied to the program in the 1980's, but was not accepted.

The Main Street Program will be expanding during 1992, with the admittance of five more Demonstration cities into the program. Unfortunately, Larkspur will not be eligible to apply for this next round because a requirement of the application process was attendance at a two-day workshop which has already been held.

According to the staff of California Main Street, it is possible that additional cities will be accepted into the Demonstration program in 1994 (18 months after the 1992 round). This future action depends upon allocation of State budget funds to the program. Thus, for the near term, Larkspur can not become a Main Street city; however, it can purchase audiovisual materials and books through the program, utilize a lending library kept by staff at the California Main Street office, and track the program for possible reapplication in 1994.

An understanding of the basic elements of the Main Street Program can be useful for Downtown Larkspur in its revitalization efforts. The Program emphasizes four key areas of action:

- **Organization.** This aspect focuses on the groups such as business associations and chambers of commerce that need to interact to implement the program. According to California Main Street, a full-time local project manager is a key element in organizational management.
- **Promotion.** Promotional and advertising activities draw shoppers and strengthen a downtown's ties to the local community. Some of the recommendations elsewhere in this Specific Plan address this aspect of the Main Street approach.

- **Design.** This aspect focuses on buildings, signs, window displays, landscaping and streetscapes. The design components of this Specific Plan provide a detailed version of this aspect of the Main Street approach.
- **Economic Restructuring.** This aspect of the Main Street approach focuses on diversifying the economic base, recruiting new stores, and improving public services. The market study and resultant recommendations in this Specific Plan provide the groundwork for this aspect of the Main Street approach.

## **2. Coordination with the Larkspur Community Association**

The Larkspur Community Association (LCA) is an organization of business owners, homeowners and community members in the Downtown that represents an important resource for improving and marketing the Downtown. City staff will maintain regular contact with the LCA or any successor organization to monitor business needs in the Downtown, and will work with LCA representatives in the implementation of Specific Plan programs, such as the selection of street furniture and the development of a signage ordinance.

## **3. Public Signage Program**

As funds become available, the City may hire a consultant to create a public signage program for the Downtown. Such a program would include directional and traffic signs and signs to mark the entries to the Downtown on Magnolia Avenue. The materials and motifs employed in the signage program should be of a high quality, and should reflect both Downtown Larkspur's historical character and a connection to the natural environment. This program might be completed through the Landscaping and Lighting District.

## **4. Freeway Signage**

The City may work with Caltrans and adjacent cities to install signage on Highway 101 and on surface streets leading to the Downtown that would direct motorists to the Historic Downtown area.

## 5. Historic Structure Renovation Program

One of the objectives of the Specific Plan is to encourage rehabilitation of historic structures in the Downtown. This can be accomplished through a number of means, including loan funds and historic preservation tax credits. The City will consider establishing such programs at a later date.

a. Revolving Loan Fund. In this type of program, the City makes funds available to building owners or merchants who wish to rehabilitate their historic building facades. Funds are distributed through loans, which are repaid with less-than-market rate interest. As funds are repaid, they can be re-loaned to other borrowers. A model program is currently functioning in Fairfield, in Solano County.

The overall cost to the City is minimal, since the actual cost is only made up by administrative costs and interest lost, but the City must have funds available for loan to make such a program work.

b. Historic Preservation Tax Credits. The Tax Credit is a dollar-for-dollar reduction in federal tax liability for an individual, corporation or partnership that chooses to spend money on physical rehabilitation of an historic building. More specifically, 20 percent of total rehabilitation costs for such buildings can be applied as credit against tax liability, provided that:

- the rehabilitation costs exceed the "adjusted cost basis," which is the cost of acquisition plus improvements minus deductible depreciation.
- the rehabilitation meets Secretary of the Interior standards as administered through the National Park Service.

Certain rehabilitation costs do not qualify, but most cost directly related to rehabilitation do qualify.

This Tax Credit can be a strong financial incentive to encourage renovation of historic buildings. For example, if a Larkspur commercial building cost \$100,000 to purchase, and "qualified rehabilitation costs" were another \$100,000, then Investor John Doe could complete the rehabilitation and deduct \$20,000 from his tax liability. If he owed \$25,000 in federal income tax in 1992, this tax credit would reduce his liability to only \$5,000, a savings of \$20,000 that he would otherwise have to pay. His net rehabilitation costs would really only be \$80,000 (net of tax savings), and he would end up with a more attractive and valuable building, worth at least \$200,000, that only cost him \$180,000 to obtain. The community also benefits by the rehabilitation, and

other Downtown merchants may benefit by an enhanced physical environment leading to increased retail activity.

No direct action is required by the City of Larkspur or other organizations to effect a private investor utilizing the Historic Tax Credit since the Historic District is already in place. However, technical assistance and/or simple promotion of the concept should be provided to private property owners.

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## **Chapter X**

### **SPECIFIC PLAN CONSISTENCY WITH THE LARKSPUR GENERAL PLAN**



California State law requires that a Specific Plan be consistent with the General Plan of the adopting locality. To ensure consistency with the City of Larkspur General Plan, the City has reviewed the existing General Plan for all policies that are relevant to the Downtown area.

The Specific Plan is generally consistent with the City of Larkspur General Plan, as described below. The General Plan mandated the preparation of this Specific Plan, so the adoption of the Specific Plan itself will be consistent with the General Plan.

#### **A. Land Use Element**

The most fundamental policy regarding land use in the City is contained in the General Plan Land Use Element. This element states that Larkspur will maintain its overall residential character, preserve the integrity, cohesiveness, historic character and residential environment of existing neighborhoods, and encourage a demographic mix within the City. In terms of retail and commercial areas, the Land Use Element also seeks to enhance the attractiveness and viability of existing commercial areas by maintaining the physical condition of each district and by discouraging the creation of new commercial areas. The Specific Plan is consistent with all these general objectives.

The Land Use Element contains a number of goals and policies oriented specifically at the Downtown and the lands immediately adjacent to it. These goals and policies are summarized here:

- Land Use Element Goal 7 seeks to preserve the character of the Downtown, especially its historic character and its surrounding neighborhoods.
- Goal 8 seeks to preserve the current mix of commercial, public and institutional, residential, and professional office uses in the Downtown and the residential areas nearby.

- Goal 9 seeks to enhance the commercial vitality of Downtown.
- Goal 10 identifies the Downtown as the clearly identified center of Larkspur, and it indicates a need for a central focal space such as a plaza or town square in the Downtown.
- Goal 15 is concerned with the maintenance of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way for public benefit.

All of these goals are reflected in this Specific Plan.

To achieve the above-mentioned goals, the following policies and action programs are suggested:

- Policy i: Maintain the existing scale of commercial establishments (smaller services and retail business), and the pedestrian orientation of the Old Downtown.
  - Action Program [12]: Develop incentives to promote the retention and development of rental residential units on the upper floors of buildings in the Old Downtown.
  - Action Program [13]: Prepare a Specific Plan for the Old Downtown which addresses appropriate uses, traffic, parking, economic vitality, building preservation and design of new development, as well as the link between the Old Downtown, the Larkspur Plaza (Lucky) Shopping Center and North Magnolia Avenue.
  - Action Program [14]: Join the California Main Street Program.
  - Policy j: Maintain and enhance the architectural character of Old Downtown.
  - Policy k: Maintain and enhance Downtown landscaping.
  - Action Program [15]: Require landscape screening of off-street parking.
  - Action Program [16]: Develop design guidelines for use by the Environmental and Design Review Board and the Heritage Preservation Board in reviewing Downtown development.
  - Policy l: Reinforce the image of Old Downtown as the clearly identifiable center of Larkspur.
  - Policy m: Strengthen the tie between the Magnolia Avenue shops and the newer shopping center at the corner of Magnolia Avenue and Doherty Drive.
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- Action Program [17]: Create a town square at or near the Ward-Magnolia intersection.
  - Policy t seeks to preserve the historic railroad station buildings near Ward Street.

The General Plan specifically states that the block between Larkspur Plaza and Ward Street containing the Nazari property and the City parking lot would be the most appropriate place for a plaza. It also suggests that this Specific Plan should consider: (1) benches or other public seating; (2) a farmers' market, open-air fresh food arcade, or similar facility at a future town square or other Downtown location; (3) the possibility of using the Lark Theater as a public or private cultural center as well as a movie theater; and (4) creating additional non-vehicular (pedestrian and bicycle) access points to Downtown to supplement Magnolia Avenue, such as completing the trail link on the Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way. The Specific Plan is consistent with all of these policies and action programs.

## **B. Circulation Element**

The General Plan Circulation Element reviews existing and future traffic conditions in the City, and sets goals and policies for automobile traffic, pedestrian and bicycle circulation, and transit. Several goals and policies in the Circulation Element have implications for the Downtown.

Goal 1 of the Circulation Element states that quality of life in Larkspur is to be regarded as more important than mobility of traffic. Policy j gives a higher priority to preserving the existing configuration of streets and buildings in the Downtown than to moving traffic through the area. This policy approach has already had clear implications for the Downtown, where the City Council has elected to make the King/Magnolia intersection a four-way stop to ensure pedestrian safety, despite the fact that this impedes traffic somewhat. Additionally, Policy n states that there should be no improvements to Magnolia Avenue that would encourage additional through traffic.

Circulation Element Goal 13 applies directly to the Downtown, and seeks to enhance the Downtown as a destination rather than a traffic corridor. Policies to aid in this effort include provision of adequate off-street parking and exploring the use of in-lieu fees, assessment districts, other financing mechanisms and shuttle service to improve and increase parking supply and accessibility in the Downtown.

The Specific Plan is consistent with all these goals and policies.

### **C. Bicycle and Pedestrian Trails and Paths Element**

The Larkspur General Plan contains this special element that seeks to make it easier to travel around Larkspur by non-motorized transportation modes. This element states that the City is served by a well-developed network of paths and bikeways.

This element features the following policies and programs that are specifically applicable to the Downtown and its surroundings:

- Policy d: Survey the paper streets of Larkspur to evaluate their usefulness in an overall path system, and preserve those paper streets identified as useful for paths.
- Action Program [14]: Improve the path of the Northwest Pacific right-of-way from William Avenue south and east to the Corte Madera city limit.
- Action Program [24]: Improve the transition from the sidewalk bike path on Magnolia Avenue, north of Doherty Drive, to the path on the Northwest Pacific right-of-way.

The Specific Plan is consistent with all these policies and action programs.

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**Chapter XI**  
**PLAN AUTHORS**

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